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# **Translating ‘Bedeutung’ in Frege’s Writings:**

## **A Case Study and Cautionary Tale in the History and Philosophy of Translation**

**Michael Beaney**

The best translator must be the best exegete ... Where is a translator who is simultaneously philosopher, poet, and philologist? He should be the morning star of a new epoch in our literature! (Herder, *Fragments*, 1767–8; quoted in Forster 2010, p. 398)

### **Abstract**

In this essay I chart the history of the different English translations of ‘Bedeutung’ in Frege’s writings, setting them in context, explaining their rationale, and exploring some of the philosophical issues raised.

### **1 Introduction**

Of all the words used by Frege in his writings, it is ‘Bedeutung’ that has proved most controversial to translate. It is an everyday German word that would normally be translated as the equally everyday English word ‘meaning’. Yet from 1891, when the distinction between ‘Sinn’ and ‘Bedeutung’ was drawn, Frege uses both terms in a technical sense, covering three different categories of linguistic expression – proper names, concept-words (or function-terms more generally) and sentences; and this is why it has been difficult to capture Frege’s use of ‘Bedeutung’.

The following terms have all been used to translate ‘Bedeutung’: ‘indication’, ‘denotation’, ‘reference’, ‘referent’, ‘nominatum’, ‘meaning’, ‘significance’, and ‘signification’. Cognates such as ‘bedeuten’, ‘bedeutungslos’, ‘bedeutungsvoll’ and ‘gleichbedeutend’ have been translated by the corresponding English cognate terms, where available, or yet other terms have been used, such as ‘stand for’ for ‘bedeuten’. In the final section of my introduction

to *The Frege Reader* (1997), I discussed the problem of translating 'Bedeutung'. Here I want to provide a much richer account by locating the different choices of how to translate 'Bedeutung' in proper historical context. Against the background provided in 'A Brief History of English Translations of Frege's Writings' (hereafter 'A Brief History'; also in this volume, see above), I shall focus here on the specific story of the translation of 'Bedeutung' (and its cognates), as especially used in Frege's writings after 1891, beginning with Russell's translation in 1903.

Translations do not simply re-present a text in another language; they are also reflections of their times and contexts. This is just as true of the choice of how to translate a given term as of the choice of what texts to translate. These choices are both historically and philosophically revealing. The choice of how to translate 'Bedeutung' is particularly revealing, not just because of the centrality of the idea of 'Bedeutung' in Frege's own philosophy – and indeed, in analytic philosophy, more generally – but also because it shows something about how the terms that are used shape our very understanding of what might broadly be called the phenomenon of 'meaning'.

Philosophy of translation can be regarded as having its origins in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Herder distinguished a 'too lax' from a 'too accommodating [*anpassende*]' translation, which has since been characterized as the distinction between 'domesticating' and 'foreignizing' translation.<sup>1</sup> As Schleiermacher describes it in 'On the Different Methods of Translation', the former approach "leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him", while the latter approach "leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him" (1813, p. 9). As we will see, both approaches are illustrated in the history of translations of Frege's use of 'Bedeutung'. Herder and Schleiermacher favoured the foreignizing approach, on the grounds that it enriches our own language (the language of the reader), and we will return to this in due course.

Considering translations of 'Bedeutung' in Frege's writings in the broader context not only of their history but also of the philosophy of translation raises

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion, see Forster 2010, esp. ch. 12 on 'Herder, Schleiermacher, and the Birth of Foreignizing Translation'.

questions that I am not sure have been properly addressed before, if at all. Are there distinctive ways in which analytic philosophy has been translated (especially German texts into English)? Are there distinctive ways in which analytic philosophers themselves translate? What principles of translation have they followed or explicitly offered, and to what extent are they compatible with their own philosophical methodologies? Bearing in mind Frege's own distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, for example, is there more to translation than simply capturing sameness of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (on the grounds, perhaps, that we are just interested in the 'thoughts' expressed)?

Assuming that Frege's distinction applies across the board, then what is the *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* of 'Bedeutung' and 'bedeuten' themselves, as used by Frege after 1891? Are they the same as any of (our standard uses of) the English terms 'reference' and 'refer to', 'denotation' and 'denote', 'meaning' and 'mean', etc.? Or are there, in fact, different relations involved here? If we can indeed talk of some one relation here, then how do the different terms differ in either sense or some other, more subtle way? Do we have genuinely robust 'intuitions' about the terms we use in characterizing the various phenomena of 'meaning' (in its broadest sense)? I am not going to answer all these questions, but I do think they should be raised and some suggestions as to how they might be answered will emerge as we explore the ways in which 'Bedeutung' has been translated in the history of translations of Frege's writings.

## 2 Russell's translation in 1903

In his appendix on Frege's doctrines in *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903), Russell translated 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' by 'meaning' and 'indication', respectively. In a footnote explaining his choice of terms, Russell writes:

I do not translate *Bedeutung* by *denotation*, because this word has a technical meaning different from Frege's, and also because *bedeuten*, for him, is not quite the same as *denoting* for me. (1903a, p. 502)

What Russell means here, of course, is that Frege's conception of *Bedeutung* is not the same as his conception of denoting, which prevents him from translating

'Bedeutung' and 'bedeuten' by 'denotation' and 'denote'. As he explains in the main text, Frege's theory is "more sweeping and general than mine, as appears from the fact that *every* proper name is supposed to have the two sides", i.e. *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. According to Russell, while "proper names as are derived from concepts by means of *the* [i.e. definite descriptions] can be said to have meaning [i.e. *Sinn*], ... such words as *John* merely indicate without meaning", i.e. have *Bedeutung* but not *Sinn* (1903a, p. 502).

On Russell's early theory of denoting, as spelt out in chapter V, it is concepts and not either we (as speakers) or linguistic expressions that denote. Russell writes: "A concept *denotes* when, if it occurs in a proposition, the proposition is not *about* the concept, but about a term [i.e. thing] connected in a certain peculiar way with the concept" (1903a, p. 53). When I say "I met a man", for example, the relevant proposition is not about the concept 'a man' but about the thing that this concept denotes (cf. *ibid.*). Denotation is thus a relation between a concept and a thing, not between a linguistic expression and a thing, thus ruling out (at this time, i.e. 1903) Russell's use of 'denotation' to translate Frege's use of 'Bedeutung'.

While Russell's own views on 'denotation' explain why he did not use this term in translating Frege, he does not explain why he chooses 'meaning' and 'indication' for 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung'. As far as 'meaning' is concerned, there is only one passage in *The Principles of Mathematics* where Russell discusses the term. In §51 he writes:

To have meaning, it seems to me, is a notion confusedly compounded of logical and psychological elements. *Words* all have meaning, in the simple sense that they are symbols which stand for something other than themselves. But a proposition, unless it happens to be linguistic, does not itself contain words: it contains the entities indicated by words. Thus meaning, in the sense in which words have meaning, is irrelevant to logic. But such concepts as *a man* have meaning in another sense: they are, so to speak, symbolic in their own logical nature, because they have the property which I call *denoting*. ... Thus concepts of this kind have meaning in a non-psychological sense. (1903a, p. 47)

If it is only concepts that have 'meaning' in a logical sense, when they 'denote', then in translating 'Sinn' by 'meaning', Russell must have had in mind the psychological sense. He only mentions here the 'simple sense' in which words have meaning by

symbolizing something other than themselves, which does not do justice to Frege's use of 'Sinn'. But he may well have regarded (at this time) Frege's notion of 'Sinn' as psychological, prompting him to use 'meaning' as its translation.<sup>2</sup>

As to 'indication', there is no clue at all in *The Principles of Mathematics* as to why Russell chose this term to translate 'Bedeutung'. In its basic sense, 'indicate' (from the Latin 'indicare') means 'point out' or 'show'.<sup>3</sup> Linguistic expressions might indeed be regarded as 'indicating' the things they stand for, so it is not unreasonable for Russell to choose this word. The German term 'andeuten' can mean 'indicate', so perhaps the similarity between 'andeuten' and 'bedeuten' also suggested the use of 'indication'.

### 3 Russell's translation in 1905

Russell's early theory of denoting concepts was abandoned in 1905, when Russell developed his theory of descriptions, as introduced in his seminal paper 'On Denoting'. His earlier conception of the relation of denotation, as supposedly holding between a concept and a thing, he came to see as incoherent. That conception was, in any case, inconsistent with a principle that Russell had adopted

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<sup>2</sup> I have found no other discussion of 'meaning' in the drafts of *The Principles* that have been published in Vol. 3 of Russell's *Collected Papers*. The only use of the term indexed in that volume occurs on p. 211, in an outline of a plan for Book I. In a brief summary of the proposed contents of chapter IV, Russell writes: "Proper Names do not have *meaning*: an old doctrine with a new sense." It is unclear what Russell had in mind here, but it might well relate to the passage about meaning just cited, which does indeed come from chapter IV of the published version of *The Principles*. When we turn to Vol. 4 of Russell's *Collected Papers*, however, which covers his work on logic from 1903 to 1905, then we find two papers, 'On the Meaning and Denotation of Phrases' and 'On Meaning and Denotation', both from 1903, which shed light on his (developing) views. In the former he distinguishes proper names, which denote individuals but have no meaning, from verbs and adjectives, which have meaning but no denotation. There is a much fuller discussion in the latter. Here Russell writes: "The meaning of a proposition or a phrase must not be supposed to be something psychological. The meaning is that which it is sought to preserve in translation into another language, where the names are different. It is an object to the mind which apprehends it, and is not itself the apprehension." (1903c, p. 316) This brings Russell closer to Frege's conception of *Sinn*. Most interestingly, however, Russell distinguishes between 'designating', 'expressing' and 'denoting': "A phrase such as 'the present Prime Minister of England' *designates* an entity, in this case Mr. Arthur Balfour, while it *expresses* a meaning, which is complex, and does not, as a rule, include the entity designated as a constituent; the relation of the meaning expressed to the entity designated is that of *denoting*." (1903c, p. 318) Designation Russell regards as a merely linguistic or symbolic relation; denotation is a fundamental logical relation, and this is what he tries to make sense of in working his way to the theory of descriptions in 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Other meanings include 'be a sign or symptom of' and 'register a reading of'. See e.g. the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2004).

in his rebellion against British idealism – that a proposition is quite literally composed of its constituents, which are what the proposition is *about*, and with which I must be acquainted in order to grasp that proposition. On Russell's early view, propositions containing denoting concepts were an exception. I can grasp the proposition expressed by 'I met a man', for example, by being acquainted with the constituent denoting concept *a man*, but I need not know who that man is, understood as one of the things that the proposition is about.

The theory of descriptions allowed Russell to maintain his fundamental principle in all its generality. Denoting phrases just needed to be 'analysed away' to make clear the real constituents with which I must be acquainted to grasp the proposition. *All* linguistic expressions have meaning – if they do – by denoting, understood as a relation between linguistic expressions and things. Russell's new theory allowed him to treat Frege's relation of 'Bedeutung' as the same as his own relation of 'denotation', freeing him to translate 'Bedeutung' by 'denotation' (instead of 'indication'), as indeed he does in 'On Denoting' in discussing Frege's views. He continues, however, to translate 'Sinn' as 'meaning'; and one of the main aims of 'On Denoting' was to show that the conception of 'meaning' was confused, because of supposed difficulties in speaking of 'meaning', and that there was no distinction to be drawn between 'meaning' and 'denotation'.

The moral of this is clear. Russell's own philosophical views influenced the choice of English terms he used to translate Frege's German terms. His views in 1903 ruled out the use of 'denotation' to translate 'Bedeutung', and it was only when he changed those views in such a way that what he meant by 'denotation' was similar to what Frege meant by 'Bedeutung' that he was able to do so. Russell also thought that there were confusions in our talk of 'meaning', and since he seems to have assumed that Frege's notion of 'Sinn' was similarly confused (and perhaps understood it psychologically), he was happy to translate that as 'meaning' – confusing as this is to us today.

#### **4 Jourdain's translation in 1912**

Russell did not discuss Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* in his work after 1905, so there are no further translations by Russell to consider. His translations did, however, influence Philip Jourdain when he wrote the account of Frege's ideas that was published in *The Quarterly Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics* in 1912. Jourdain here follows Russell in 'On Denoting' in rendering 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' as 'meaning' and 'denotation'. He gives no explanation of why he uses these terms, though he does note that Russell had himself translated 'Bedeutung' by 'indication' in *The Principles of Mathematics*, and he also mentions certain other distinctions that had been drawn in logic, such as that between denotation and connotation.<sup>4</sup>

At two points in his account of Frege's ideas in 'Function and Concept' (1891), however, Jourdain translates 'Bedeutung' as 'signification'. The second is surely a slip, since it occurs in translating the passage in which Frege first introduces the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*.<sup>5</sup> But the first is where Jourdain reports on Frege's claim of how, in his work, he has widened the 'Bedeutung' of the word 'function'.<sup>6</sup> It would sound odd to translate this as 'denotation': 'signification' is better. 'Meaning' is also better, and perhaps best, but that would have been confusing given Jourdain's use of 'meaning' to translate 'Sinn'.

'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' are also rendered as 'meaning' and 'denotation' in the translation of the first 30 pages or so of the *Grundgesetze* that Jourdain published in collaboration with Stachelroth in *The Monist* in 1915–17. Frege only mentions his distinction between 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' a couple of times in these pages,<sup>7</sup> and again, there is no explanation of why they are translated as 'meaning'

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<sup>4</sup> Jourdain 1912, fn. 153; repr. in Frege 1980, pp. 201–2.

<sup>5</sup> Frege 1891, p. 13. Here is the passage as translated by Jourdain: "Here the objection lies ready to hand that " $2^2 = 4$ " and " $2 > 1$ " express quite different thoughts; but also " $2^4 = 4^2$ " and " $4.4 = 4^2$ " express different thoughts, and yet we can replace " $2^4$ " by " $4.4$ " because both signs have the same signification. Consequently " $2^4 = 4^2$ " and " $4.4 = 4^2$ " have the same denotation." (Frege 1980, p. 201) Later in the same paragraph Frege talks of " $2^4$ " and " $4.4$ " having the same 'Bedeutung', which Jourdain translates as 'denotation', so the occurrence of 'signification' is presumably an error. It does, however, follow soon after his first (appropriate) use of 'signification' to translate 'Bedeutung', so it may have been prompted by this.

<sup>6</sup> Frege 1891, p. 12; reported by Jourdain in Frege 1980, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> Frege 1893, pp. IX–X, 7; translated in Frege 1915, pp. 489–90; 1917, p. 121.



and 'denotation'. But it does suggest the continuing influence of Russell's 1905 choice of terms.

## 5 Wittgenstein's translation – and the translation of Wittgenstein – in 1913–14

As mentioned in section 3 of 'A Brief History', Wittgenstein went to Cambridge to work with Russell in 1911. In 1913, before he left to live in Norway, he left some notes on logic for Russell. Some of these (drawn from his notebooks) he had dictated in German, which Russell then translated, others he had written down in English during and immediately after discussion with Russell.<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein remarks upon – and criticizes – some of Frege's ideas in these notes, and we find here 'sense' being used to translate 'Sinn' and 'meaning' being used to translate 'Bedeutung'.

Wittgenstein does not directly refer to Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, but that distinction is clearly in his mind. Wittgenstein does not endorse the distinction, but nor has he yet reached the views expressed in the *Tractatus*. In the 'Summary' that he put together (in English) for Russell, he writes: "The meaning [*Bedeutung*] of a proposition is the fact which actually corresponds to it". This is not Frege's view, nor his own later view, according to which names have meaning ('Bedeutung') but not sense ('Sinn'), and propositions have sense but not meaning (see e.g. TLP, 3.3). The view is much closer to Russell's, although Russell remains cautious about talk of 'meaning' and at the time held 'propositions' to be 'incomplete symbols'.<sup>9</sup> But with these qualifications, it would not be misleading to characterize Russell as holding that the meaning of a proposition is the fact to which it corresponds. Indeed, in the lectures on the philosophy of logical atomism that he gave in 1918, written under the influence of

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed account of the history of the composition of these notes, see Potter 2009, App. A. The notes initially dictated in German Potter calls 'the Birmingham Notes' and the others 'the Cambridge Notes', which includes a 'Summary' drawn from all of the other notes; both are reprinted in App. B of Potter's book. The notes were published as App. I of Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914–1916* (1961, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Russell 1913, pp. 106, 109. What is striking about this 'Theory of Knowledge' manuscript is how little Russell talks about 'meaning'. Just about the only discussion is on the pages just cited, where he writes that "to find out what is meant by 'the meaning of a phrase' is very difficult" (p. 106; cf. p. 134).

Wittgenstein, he remarks: "the sentence 'Socrates is mortal' means a certain fact" (1918, p. 186); and he goes on to talk of propositions 'corresponding to' facts (1918, p. 187).

Wittgenstein's conception of 'Sinn' is also different from Frege's. Again, in the 'Summary' he writes:

I say that if an  $x$  stands in the relation  $R$  to a  $y$  the sign " $xRy$ " is to be called true to the fact and otherwise false. This is a definition of sense.  
In my theory  $p$  has the same meaning as not- $p$  but opposite sense. The meaning is the fact. (1979, p. 95)

In the *Tractatus*, corresponding to the last two sentences, we have: "The propositions ' $p$ ' and ' $\sim p$ ' have opposite sense, but one and the same reality corresponds to them" (4.0621). What is interesting here is that Wittgenstein no longer talks of 'Bedeutung', though the underlying idea remains – that there is always some 'reality' corresponding to a proposition. Wittgenstein's conception of sense also changed between 1913 and the publication of the *Tractatus*, most notably when the picture theory was introduced in September 1914, but the bipolarity of a proposition alluded to here was already present in the notes of 1913 (see e.g. 1979, pp. 98–9, 101–2).

Wittgenstein seems to have initially held, with Frege, that propositions have both *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, although he interpreted both differently, and he soon came to reject the view that propositions have *Bedeutung*.<sup>10</sup> But it seems very natural to translate Wittgenstein's use of 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' as 'sense' and 'meaning', respectively; and indeed Russell seems to have had no problem in following Wittgenstein himself in the translations that he made of Wittgenstein's notes (despite his own earlier choice of 'meaning' to translate Frege's use of 'Sinn'). Russell was presumably happy, for example, in recording: "Neither the sense nor the meaning of a proposition is a thing" (1979, p. 102).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For an account of this, see Potter 2009, ch. 14.

<sup>11</sup> The next sentence in the notes is "These words are incomplete symbols". In a letter which Russell wrote to Wittgenstein on 25 October 1913, when Wittgenstein was in Norway, Russell asks him what he meant by this, as one of a series of questions he had had in translating Wittgenstein's notes on logic. In reply, Wittgenstein reiterates that the 'Bedeutung' of a proposition is a fact, but that this is not to be regarded as a 'thing'. He goes on: "The answer is *of course* this: The Bedeutung of a

Given the obvious influence of Frege on Wittgenstein, it might then seem equally natural to carry over the choice of 'sense' and 'meaning' to the translation of Frege's own use of 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung'. As mentioned above, Wittgenstein does not explicitly refer to Frege's conception of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* in his 'Notes on Logic'.<sup>12</sup> But he does do so three times in the *Tractatus*. In 5.02 he refers to Frege's theory of the *Bedeutung* of propositions and functions, and in 5.4733 he makes a remark about Frege's conception of the *Sinn* of a proposition. He only refers explicitly to Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* in 6.232, in discussing equations, where two expressions are connected by the sign of equality: "Frege says that the two expressions have the same meaning [*Bedeutung*] but different sense [*Sinn*]." In both the Ogden and Ramsey translation (1922) and in the later Pears and McGuinness translation (1961), 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' are rendered throughout the *Tractatus* by 'sense' and 'meaning', whether in expressing Wittgenstein's own ideas or in reporting (or criticizing) Frege's views.<sup>13</sup>

## 6 Interlude: Anscombe's translation of Wittgenstein's *Notebooks 1914–1916*

As far as Wittgenstein's early work is concerned, then, it might look as if we have agreement among his various translators as to how 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' are translated, which might then be regarded as carrying over to the translation of Frege's work. Taking Wittgenstein himself as our guide, as someone close to Frege, 'sense' and 'meaning' might be suggested as the best terms to use. These hopes for agreement, however, are quickly dashed when we turn to the translation of the notebooks that Wittgenstein wrote from August 1914 to January 1917, which was done by Anscombe and first published in 1961. (This is to leap forwards in our

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prop[osition] is symbolized by the proposition – which is *of course* not an incomplete symbol, *but the word "Bedeutung" is an incomplete symbol*" (1979, pp. 124–5/2008, pp. 50, 52). It is worth noting that Wittgenstein uses 'Bedeutung' here untranslated.

<sup>12</sup> Nor does he do so in either the notes dictated to Moore in Norway in April 1914 (1979, App. II) or the *Notebooks 1914–1916* (1979), with the sole exception of his second entry on 2 September 1914, which is repeated word for word in TLP, 5.4733.

<sup>13</sup> As far as the Ogden and Ramsey translation is concerned, it is worth noting that Russell passed on to the translators "all that you and I agreed on as regards translations of terms", as Russell puts it in a letter to Wittgenstein dated 24 December 1921 (Wittgenstein 2008, p. 130). This presumably included agreement on the translation of 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung'.

story, but it might be best to consider it here – though as something of an interlude – since we are still concerned with Wittgenstein's views in the 1910s.)

Wittgenstein uses the word 'Bedeutung' or one of its cognates ('bedeuten', '(gleich/un)bedeutend', and 'bedeutungslos') 51 times in the *Notebooks*.<sup>14</sup> The first use (on p. 2) occurs in commenting on Frege's conception of sense (which is, in fact, the only time he refers to Frege's views on either *Sinn* or *Bedeutung*). This remark is included in the *Tractatus* (5.4733), and here 'Bedeutung' is translated as 'meaning' (as it is in the translation of the *Tractatus*). The second use (on p. 5) is also translated as 'meaning', where Wittgenstein talks of a proposition as "a logical portrayal of its meaning". The third use (on p. 11), however, is translated as 'reference': "a completely analysed proposition contains just as many names as there are things contained in its reference". After all that has come before (and his 'Notes on Logic'), this sounds strange. Why 'reference'? To get an answer from the translator, we have to wait until the fourth occurrence of 'Bedeutung' (on p. 15): "*Roughly* speaking: before any proposition can make sense at all the logical constants must have reference". To this use of 'reference', Anscombe provides a footnote:

I render 'Bedeutung', here and elsewhere, by 'reference' in order to bring it especially to the reader's attention, (a) that Wittgenstein was under the influence of Frege in his use of 'Sinn' ('sense') and 'Bedeutung' ('reference' or 'meaning' in the sense 'what a word or sentence *stands for*') and (b) that there is a great contrast between his ideas at this stage of the *Notebooks* and those of the *Tractatus*, where he denies that logical constants or sentences have 'Bedeutung'. (1979, p. 15.)

Anscombe makes two substantial interpretive claims here. But neither is uncontroversial. As far as the first is concerned, Wittgenstein was also under the influence of Russell, and his early conception of the 'Bedeutung' of propositions is arguably closer to Russell's than to Frege's views, as we have just seen. As far as

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<sup>14</sup> For the record, these occur on the following pages: 2, 5, 11, 15, 17 (3 times), 18, 19 ('gleichbedeutend'), 20 (3 times), 22 (3 times), 23 (2 times, one of them 'gleichbedeutend'), 24 (3 times), 34 (3 times), 40, 45, 46 (4 times), 47 ('bedeuten'), 49 (2 times, one of them 'bedeuten'), 58 (2 times, both 'bedeutungslos'), 60 (3 times), 66 (2 times, one of them 'bedeuten'), 67, 68 (2 times), 71 (3 times), 72, 83 (2 times, 'unbedeutend' and 'gleichbedeutend'), 84, 91. As I go on to say, of these 51 uses, 25 concern the 'Bedeutung' of names and 22 the 'Bedeutung' of propositions. The other 4 are uses of 'Bedeutung' and its cognates in the sense of 'significance' – on pp. 47, 83 (2 times), 84. These last four raise no difficulties of translation, and I shall ignore them here.

the second is concerned, Wittgenstein had already in 1912, in a letter to Russell (1979, p. 120/2008, p. 30), claimed that the consequence of a correct account of logic “*must* be that there are NO *logical* constants”. The suggestion that the logical constants have ‘meaning’ is arguably weaker than the suggestion that they have ‘reference’, which does seem inconsistent with the claim that there are no logical constants, i.e., that the logical constants do not refer to objects. So Anscombe’s translation accentuates the supposed contrast not only between Wittgenstein’s views in 1914 and those expressed in the *Tractatus* but also between those views in 1914 and Wittgenstein’s even earlier views.

What we have here is another example of a philosopher’s own philosophical views or interpretation influencing their translation of another philosopher. Leaving the two interpretive claims aside, however, is Anscombe’s use of ‘reference’ to translate ‘Bedeutung’ good anyway? Two objections immediately suggest themselves. First, as we have seen, Wittgenstein himself uses ‘meaning’ to translate ‘Bedeutung’ – as used by both him and Frege. So why should we depart from Wittgenstein’s own choice? Second, Anscombe clearly presupposes that ‘reference’ is the best translation of Frege’s use of ‘Bedeutung’. But she gives no good reason here for doing so – other than to suggest that it means ‘meaning’ in the sense of ‘what a word or sentence *stands for*’. However, Anscombe’s translation was published in 1961, and we have yet to consider how ‘reference’ came to be used in translating Frege. So leaving this aside as well for the moment, let us look in more detail at how ‘Bedeutung’ and its cognates are translated by Anscombe.

That Anscombe should have added her translator’s footnote to the fourth use of ‘Bedeutung’ in the *Notebooks* is significant. For it is more plausible to talk of names – rather than sentences – as having ‘reference’. Wittgenstein might have denied (or come to deny) that signs for the logical constants have ‘reference’, but the claim itself makes sense. Of the 51 uses of ‘Bedeutung’ and its cognates in the *Notebooks*, 25 of them concern names (understood here as including signs for logical constants and other logical signs – any expression, in other words, that is

not a sentence). 15 of these are translated by 'reference',<sup>15</sup> 7 by 'meaning' and its cognates,<sup>16</sup> 2 by 'import', and 1 by 'stand for'.<sup>17</sup> This already suggests inconsistency in Anscombe's translation. On the very page on which she puts her footnote, for example, where Wittgenstein is still talking of the 'Bedeutung' (which she translates as 'reference') of the logical constants, she translates 'gleichbedeutend sind' as 'have the same meaning' (p. 15). And on page 34, to take another example, we have Wittgenstein talking of "the meaning [*Bedeutung*] of negation" but in the very next sentence of how "the sign of negation must surely mirror its own reference [*Bedeutung*]" . At the very least, Anscombe's translation loses the connection that surely holds between these two uses of 'Bedeutung'. Later, we have Wittgenstein talking of the 'reference [*Bedeutung*]' of variables (p. 67) but of the 'meaning [*Bedeutung*]' of signs (p. 71).

22 of Wittgenstein's uses of 'Bedeutung' or one of its cognates in the *Notebooks* concern propositions, all but three of them translated as 'reference'.<sup>18</sup> The first of these exceptions (on p. 5, noted above) might be regarded as a slip, but the second is interesting, as it occurs just before a sentence in which 'Bedeutung' is translated as 'reference':

Analysis makes the proposition more complicated than it was, but it cannot and must not make it more complicated than its meaning [*Bedeutung*] was from the first.

When the proposition is just as complex as its reference [*Bedeutung*], then it is completely analysed. (1979, p. 46)

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<sup>15</sup> For the record, these are on pp. 15, 20, 34 (twice), 45, 46, 49, 60 (thrice), 67, 68 (twice), 71, 91. All of these concern 'Bedeutung', and all are translated by 'reference' (or 'references', in the plural, on p. 20).

<sup>16</sup> For the record, these are on pp. 2, 15 ('gleichbedeutend sind' translated as 'have the same meaning'), 34, 58 ('bedeutungslos' translated as 'meaningless'), 71 (twice), 72 ('Bedeutungen' translated as 'meanings').

<sup>17</sup> The term 'import' is used for both 'bedeuten' and 'Bedeutung' on p. 66, in talking of certain logical signs; 'stand for' is used on p. 49 for 'bedeute'. It should be noted that Anscombe never translates the verb 'bedeuten' as 'refer to'; she uses either 'stand for' (p. 49) or 'signify' (p. 47).

<sup>18</sup> For the record, these occur on pp. 5 ('Bedeutung' translated as 'meaning'), 11, 17 (thrice), 18, 19 ('gleichbedeutend wäre' translated as 'would have the same reference'), 20 (twice), 22 (thrice), 23 (twice, one of them 'ist gleichbedeutend' translated as 'has the same reference'), 24 (thrice), 40, 46 (thrice, one of them 'Bedeutung' translated as 'meaning'), 58 ('bedeutungslos' translated as 'meaningless').

Perhaps there is something to be said for translating the first occurrence of 'Bedeutung' as 'meaning', but however one translates the two occurrences, they should surely be translated the same. Despite her claim about translating 'Bedeutung' everywhere as 'reference', then, Anscombe is inconsistent. Of the 51 uses, 17 – exactly a third – are not translated as 'reference'. Some are rightly translated otherwise; but the inconsistency does suggest a problem in rendering 'Bedeutung' uniformly as 'reference'. In suggesting this, let us leave the last word here to Wittgenstein himself, but in Anscombe's translation:

Isn't it like this: the false proposition makes sense [*Sinn*] like the true and independently of its falsehood or truth, but it has no reference [*Bedeutung*]? (Is there not here a better use of the word "reference [*Bedeutung*]")?

Isn't it like this: does translating 'Bedeutung' here as 'reference' rather than 'meaning' really make sense of these two questions?

## 7 Ogden and Richard's *The Meaning of Meaning*

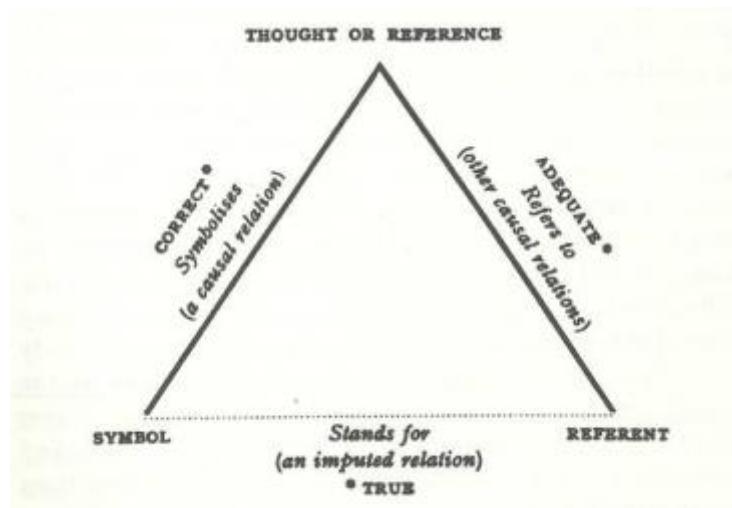
In 1923 C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards published *The Meaning of Meaning*. It was to go through 10 editions: revised editions appeared in 1926, 1930, and 1936, and the tenth edition was published in 1949. In a letter to Russell, Wittgenstein called it a 'miserable' book, on the grounds that it made philosophy look too easy (2008, p. 137). Russell, too, considered it unimportant, but nevertheless reviewed it to help Ogden by encouraging its sale.<sup>19</sup> The book is admittedly frustrating if one is looking for clear analyses, arguments and theses. It surveys a lot of literature, and proceeds by commenting on this literature, citing and discussing a wide variety of examples of uses of 'meaning' and symbolic terms generally, and introducing terminology and classifications that are not always easy to keep track of. Historically, however, the book is important, as it put the topic of meaning on the intellectual map. As Ogden wrote in a letter to Russell in November 1921: "Folk here still don't think there is a problem of *Meaning* at all" (Russell 1975, p. 354). The so-called 'linguistic turn' in philosophy might have its roots in Wittgenstein's

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<sup>19</sup> See Ramsey's letter to Wittgenstein of 20 February 1924 (Wittgenstein 2008, p. 147).

*Tractatus* (if not, further back, in Frege's work), but *The Meaning of Meaning* gave it a much wider currency.

Appendix D contains accounts of the views of meaning of 'Some Moderns' – namely, Husserl, Russell, Frege, Gomperz, Baldwin, and Peirce. The account of Frege's 'theory of Meaning' is only a page, and simply follows what Russell says in Appendix A of *The Principles of Mathematics*, with 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' rendered as 'meaning' and 'indication', which we have already mentioned. The importance of *The Meaning of Meaning* in this story of the translation of Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' lies in its discussion in the first chapter of the relationship between words, thoughts, and things, as captured in the following diagram (1949, p. 11).



Here is what Ogden and Richards say about the relationships here:

Between a thought and a symbol causal relations hold. When we speak, the symbolism we employ is caused partly by the reference we are making and partly by social and psychological factors—the purpose for which we are making the reference, the proposed effect of our symbols on other persons, and our own attitude. When we hear what is said, the symbols both cause us to perform an act of reference and to assume an attitude which will, according to circumstances, be more or less similar to the act and the attitude of the speaker.

Between the Thought and the Referent there is also a relation; more or less direct (as when we think about or attend to a coloured surface we see), or indirect (as when we 'think of' or 'refer to' Napoleon), in which case there may be a very long chain of sign-situations intervening between the act and its referent: word—historian—contemporary record—eye-witness—referent (Napoleon).



Between the symbol and the referent there is no relevant relation other than the indirect one, which consists in its being used by someone to stand for a referent. Symbol and Referent, that is to say, are not connected directly (and when, for grammatical reasons, we imply such a relation, it will merely be an imputed, as opposed to a real, relation), but only indirectly round the two sides of the triangle. (1949, pp. 10–12)

Philosophically, the third relation here, between symbol and referent, is of greatest significance for the argument of the book. For the failure to recognize that this is only an 'imputed' and not a real relation is responsible, on their view, for most of the philosophical problems of language. We use the word 'means' as implying a direct relation between words and things, but it should really be seen as just 'shorthand' or 'telescopic' for the more complex, indirect relation that goes via thought (cf. 1949, pp. 12, 14). As they put it, "The fundamental and most prolific fallacy is ... that the base of the triangle given above is filled in" (1949, p. 15).

For our present purposes, though, what is most interesting about this account is the use of the terms 'symbolises', 'refers to', and 'stands for' for the three relations. Symbols 'symbolise' thoughts and 'stand for' referents, while thoughts 'refer to' referents. As to 'referent', Ogden and Richards make clear in a footnote that this is a technical term introduced "to stand for whatever we may be thinking of or referring to", a term that they suggest is preferable to 'object', which has had "an unfortunate history" (1949, p. 9, fn. 1).

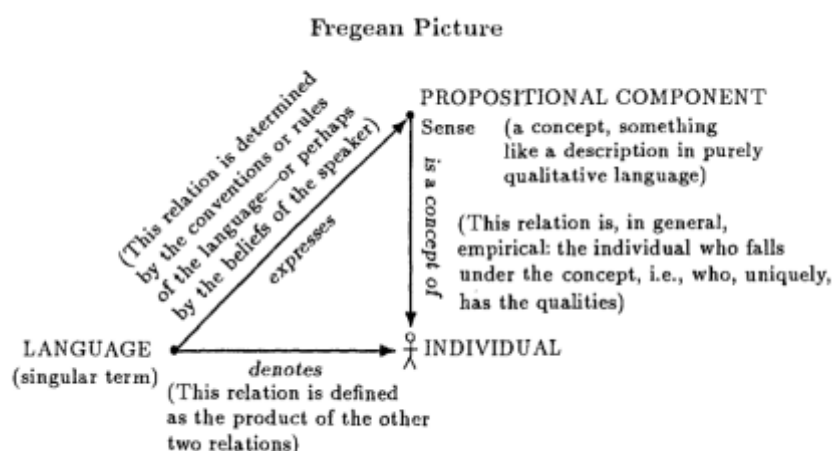
Ogden and Richards' triangle has an obvious application to Frege's conception of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, with 'referent' being the implied translation of 'Bedeutung'. According to Frege, symbols (names, concept-words, and sentences) 'express' (Frege's term is 'ausdrücken') their *Sinn* and 'stand for' ('bedeuten' or 'bezeichnen') their *Bedeutung*. But signs or symbols have *Bedeutung*, in Frege's view, *through* having a sense; and this is exactly what is captured in Ogden and Richards' triangle and emphasized in their claim that 'stands for' is an imputed relation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For a similar triangular representation of Frege's conception of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, see Kaplan 1977, p. 485:

Chapter 9 of the book bears the title of the book itself – 'The Meaning of Meaning'. Ogden and Richards here distinguish 16 different meanings of 'meaning', some of them further subdivided, but collected into three groups. The previous chapter had surveyed some of the different uses of 'meaning' made by philosophers, and chapter 9 opens with the claim that "A study of the utterances of Philosophers suggests that they are not to be trusted in their dealings with Meaning" (1949, p. 185). They immediately draw one distinction that is reflected in the first group (Group A) of meanings of 'meaning', which comprises meaning as "an intrinsic property" and meaning as "a unique unanalysable Relation to other things" (1949, p. 186). They write: "We may either take Meaning as standing for the relation between A and B, when A means B, or as standing for B" (1949, p. 185). They recommend avoiding this ambiguity by using the terms 'reference' and 'referent'. This distinction has indeed been respected when scholars of Frege's work suggest that 'Bedeutung' is best captured by 'referent' rather than 'reference'.

In discussing the fourth meaning of 'meaning' – "the Connotation of a word" – Ogden and Richards criticise Mill's distinction between 'denotation' and 'connotation', and again repeat the central claim of chapter 1: "Neither denoting nor connoting can be used as if it were either a simple or a fundamental relation. To take denotation first, no word has any denotation apart from some reference which it symbolizes." (1949, p. 188) Treating 'denoting' as the name of a simple



Kaplan also describes the bottom relation here as the product of the other two relations. I am grateful to Matt Moss for drawing my attention to this diagram.

logical relation, they write, is "ludicrous" (ibid.), and they take the 'inextricable tangle' that Russell got himself into in 'On Denoting' in trying to explain the relation between 'meaning' and 'denotation' as an illustration of the failure to appreciate that 'denoting' is not a direct relation (cf. 1949, p. 190).

This suggests, then, that Ogden and Richards would have been more sympathetic to Frege's conception of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* than to Russell's conception of denoting as it was encapsulated in his theory of descriptions. In this context, translating 'bedeuten' as 'denote' would be highly misleading. Rendering it as 'stand for' might be better, as long as we recognise that that is an 'imputed' relation, which actually needs to be analysed into a combination of 'symbolising' and 'referring'.

## 8 Carnap's translation in *Meaning and Necessity*

In §28 of *Meaning and Necessity*, which was published in 1947, Carnap offers an account of Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. Carnap translates 'Sinn' as 'sense' and 'Bedeutung' as 'nominatum'. In a footnote on the translation of Frege's key terms, Carnap says that he follows Russell and Church in most cases,<sup>21</sup> but he certainly departs from them in translating 'Bedeutung' as 'nominatum'. Both Russell (from 1905) and Church had used 'denotation'. When Herbert Feigl translated 'Über Sinn and Bedeutung', published in 1949, Feigl followed Carnap, but except for this, the use of 'nominatum' never caught on. So why did Carnap use it?

Carnap's account of Frege's distinction occurs in a chapter entitled 'The Method of the Name-Relation'. This method is described as "an alternative method of semantical analysis, more customary than the method of extension and intension", and consists in treating an expression as a name for a (concrete or abstract) entity, which Carnap calls its 'nominatum' (1956, p. 96). Carnap writes that there are various phrases used to express this name-relation, among them 'x is a name for y', 'x denotes y', 'x designates y', 'x is a designation for y', and 'x

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<sup>21</sup> Carnap 1956 (2nd ed. of Carnap 1947), p. 118, fn. 21. He refers to Russell 1905 and various papers by Church from the early 1940s.

signifies  $y$ ', and suggests ' $x$  names  $y$ ' as the shorthand form for this relation. But how should the converse relation be expressed? Corresponding candidates would be ' $y$  is named by  $x$ ' or ' $y$  is what is named by  $x$ ', ' $y$  is denoted by  $x$ ' or ' $y$  is what is denoted by  $x$ ', and so on. Introducing the term 'nominatum' ('what is named'), Carnap suggests ' $y$  is the nominatum of  $x$ ' as the shorthand (canonical) form for this relation.

Carnap clearly interprets Frege's conception of *Bedeutung* as involving a name-relation, and this leads him to use 'nominatum' as the translation of 'Bedeutung'. But this choice also reflects Carnap's own philosophical methodology, and in particular, his conception of *explication*, which had been introduced just two years earlier (in 1945),<sup>22</sup> and which is explained at the very beginning of *Meaning and Necessity*:

The task of making more exact a vague or not quite exact concept used in everyday life or in an earlier stage of scientific or logical development, or rather of replacing it by a newly constructed, more exact concept, belongs among the most important tasks of logical analysis and logical construction. We call this the task of explicating, or of giving an *explication* for, the earlier concept; this earlier concept, or sometimes the term used for it, is called the *explicandum*; and the new concept, or its term, is called an *explicatum* of the old one. (1956, pp. 7-8)

Carnap immediately goes on to cite Frege's and Russell's logicist definition of the natural numbers as an example of explication; and it is clear that he also saw Frege's conception of *Bedeutung* as an explication of our ordinary conception of the name-relation. He writes:

It seems that Frege, in introducing the distinction between nominatum and sense, had the intention of making more precise a certain distinction which had been made in various forms in traditional logic. Thus his task was one of explication [in the sense explained earlier]. (1956, p. 126)

According to Carnap, there are two distinctions in the history of logic for which Frege's distinction might be considered an explication – the distinction between 'extension' and 'comprehension', as found in the Port-Royal Logic, and the

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<sup>22</sup> For an account of the origins of Carnap's conception of 'explication', see Beaney 2004; and for further discussion of the conception, see the essays collected in Wagner 2012.

distinction between 'denotation' and 'connotation', as exemplified in Mill's logic. It is of the latter that he suggests Frege's distinction is an explication. (1956, p. 127) On Carnap's view, then, Frege's conception of 'Bedeutung' explicates the (Millian) conception of 'denotation', and should be seen as "a newly constructed, more exact concept" (to quote Carnap's own words). Translating 'Bedeutung' as 'nominatum' therefore makes clear its supposed status as the *explicatum* of that (Millian) conception of 'denotation'. Not only is 'nominatum' a suitably invented term, but its Latin etymology clearly resonates with 'explicatum'.

We can push the idea of explication one step further here. For the question arises as to whether Carnap might be seen as offering an explication of 'Bedeutung' in translating it as 'nominatum'. Carnap does not seem to recognise this question, but he would presumably *not* regard it as an explication, on the grounds that Frege's notion of *Bedeutung* is already "a newly constructed, more exact concept". All that is then needed is an exact translation, capturing at the very least, both the *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* of 'Bedeutung' (as used by Frege). 'Nominatum' is intended to do just this. However, since it is not obvious that Frege's conception of *Bedeutung* really does involve the 'name-relation', as Carnap conceives it, and certainly not when we consider its extension to the case of concept-words and sentences, there would be reason to regard Carnap's construal of 'Bedeutung' as 'nominatum' as itself an explication. The role of 'nominatum' as a translation is then compromised.

Of course, we might agree with Carnap that Frege's notion of 'Bedeutung' is in some sense intended as an 'explication' of one of our ordinary notions of meaning, an obvious candidate being our ordinary notion of 'denotation', as roughly what Mill or Russell may have had in mind. But Frege himself did not invent a term to express this explication – in the way that he did, for example, in introducing the term 'Werthverlauf' or even 'das Wahre' or 'das Falsche'. He used the very ordinary German term 'Bedeutung'.<sup>23</sup> So one might think that an obvious constraint on any adequate translation must be the preservation of the degree of 'ordinariness' of the translated term, even when it is being used in a technical

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<sup>23</sup> In opening the *Grundlagen*, for example, Frege writes: "Auf die Frage, was die Zahl Eins sei, oder was das Zeichen 1 bedeute, wird man meistens die Antwort erhalten: nun, ein Ding" (1884, p. I). The verb 'bedeuten' is being used in a very ordinary sense here. Of course, he is writing before the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction was formulated, but it illustrates very well the sense that he might be taken to be later explicating (even though he uses the same verb).

sense. In Carnapianese, the semantic and pragmatic connections between *convertandum* and *convertatum* must be much tighter than those between *explicandum* and *explicatum*.

## 9 Black's translation in 1948

A year after the appearance of the first edition of Carnap's *Meaning and Necessity*, Max Black's translation of 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' was published in the *Philosophical Review*. Black here translates the title as 'Sense and Reference', but in the text he mainly uses 'referent' as the translation of 'Bedeutung'. As he explains in the list he provides of Frege's technical terms, he translates 'Bedeutung' as 'reference' where 'the process' is meant and as 'referent' where 'the object' is meant (and the latter is what is meant on the vast majority of occasions). The verb 'bedeuten' is translated as 'refer to' throughout.

In the 'Introductory Note' that precedes the translation, Black writes:

The point of central interest is Frege's distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and designation or denotation or, as I have chosen to call it, reference (*Bedeutung*). This corresponds, in some measure, to a distinction which other philosophers have made between *connotation* and *denotation*, or *intension* and *extension* (or even *description* and *acquaintance*). But Frege's distinction is not to be identified with any of these. ...

In trying to prepare a *literal* translation which will not sound foreign, one runs into obvious difficulties. In the present instance, these are aggravated by the novelty of Frege's ideas and the consequent lack of a settled terminology for their expression. (Thus some may object to my choice of "refer to" for *bedeuten* and "referent" for *Bedeutung*. But "denote" is misleading, "designatum" clumsy, and "nominatum"—Carnap's suggestion—too new for general acceptance.)

Carnap's account in *Meaning and Necessity* is clearly in the background here, reflected both in Black's remark about Frege's distinction corresponding "in some measure" to the connotation/denotation and intension/extension distinctions and in his mention of Carnap's use of 'nominatum' to translate 'Bedeutung'. Black just rejects the use of 'nominatum' as "too new" (too 'foreignizing'), but it is presumably, also, no less clumsy than 'designatum'. He does not explain why 'denote' is misleading nor why he chooses 'referent' and not 'meaning'. Given that Black had studied in Cambridge and was in Britain in the

1930s (see 'A Brief History', §4), however, one might reasonably conjecture that he was influenced by *The Meaning of Meaning*. The range of meanings of 'meaning' identified in this book would have made 'meaning' too unclear, and as we have seen, Ogden and Richards criticize the (Russellian) idea of denoting as a simple logical relation. Furthermore, as their triangle shows, 'referent' was the term suggested for the object that is referred to, which makes the term entirely appropriate to translate Frege's (technical) use of 'Bedeutung'. We will return to Black's translation shortly, after we have briefly considered two further translations of Frege's works.

### 10 Feigl's translation in 1949

As mentioned earlier, a second translation of 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' was published in 1949. This was done by Herbert Feigl and appeared in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars. Forming the first reader in 'modern philosophical analysis', as the editors called it, this work included both Frege's 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' and Russell's 'On Denoting'. Including both these texts together would have made it misleading to translate 'Bedeutung' as 'denotation', as if Frege and Russell were talking about the same thing. Feigl translates the title of Frege's essay as 'On Sense and Nominatum', and in a footnote to the title writes that "The terminology adopted is largely that used by R. Carnap in *Meaning and Necessity*" (1949, p. 85). In particular, 'Bedeutung' is translated as either 'nominatum' or 'nominata', depending on whether there is talk of a single word or words in the plural (even though Frege himself tends to use 'Bedeutung' only in the singular throughout). But Feigl is not entirely consistent. In one place, apparently out of the blue, he uses 'denotation' and 'connotation' to translate 'Bedeutung' and 'Sinn' (1949, p. 87), and 'nominatum' is also used once to translate 'Bezeichneten' (1949, p. 85). There is no consistency at all in the translation of the verb 'bedeuten': it is rendered as either 'designate', 'name', 'denote', or 'signify'. Since Feigl does not explain his choice of terms, however, other than to note that he follows Carnap, there is little more to say as far as our current purposes are concerned.

## 11 Austin's translation of *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* in 1950

Austin's translation of *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, published in 1950, also deserves mention. Throughout Austin translates 'Bedeutung' as 'meaning', 'Sinn' as 'sense' (with some exceptions), and 'Inhalt' as 'content'.<sup>24</sup> The *Grundlagen* itself was published in 1884, so before the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* was drawn (which first appeared in print in 'Function and Concept' in 1891); and in his early work there are places where Frege seems to use the terms 'Bedeutung', 'Sinn' and 'Inhalt' more or less interchangeably. Certainly, 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' lack the technical sense that they acquired later. Given that the most natural rendering of 'Bedeutung' is indeed 'meaning', Austin's translation is appropriate (and I followed it in *The Frege Reader*).

That Frege may use the terms 'Bedeutung', 'Sinn' and 'Inhalt' more or less interchangeably in places does not mean that we are free to vary our translations of those terms, sometimes translating 'Sinn' as 'sense' and sometimes as 'meaning', for example. Frege's failure to distinguish clearly between 'Bedeutung', 'Sinn' and 'Inhalt' arguably gives rise to the notorious problems in the central argument of the *Grundlagen* (§§ 60–9).<sup>25</sup> So it is essential that these terms are translated consistently so as not to make it more difficult for an English reader to interpret Frege's argument or diagnose what goes wrong. It is to Austin's credit that he does indeed translate these terms consistently.

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<sup>24</sup> For the record, in the *Grundlagen* Frege uses 'Bedeutung' 32 times (on pp. x, I, VII (twice), X (twice), 9, 13, 37 (twice), 38, 39, 48, 55, 66 (twice), 71 (thrice), 72, 78, 79, 96, 97, 98, 109, 110 (four times), 111, 116), 'bedeuten' 17 times (on pp. I (thrice), 8 (twice), 13, 22, 42, 47, 51, 73, 96, 111, 113 (four times)), and 'gleichbedeutend' 9 times (on pp. 50, 56, 76, 85 (twice), 89, 92, 94, 96). In every case these are translated by 'meaning' or one of its cognates, with the sole exception of the first occurrence of 'gleichbedeutend' (p. 50), which is translated as 'equivalent'. 'Sinn' occurs more frequently, in its range of uses, and is generally translated as 'sense', though there are exceptions such as when Austin translates 'Kant hat offenbar nur kleine Zahlen im Sinne gehabt' as 'Kant, obviously, was thinking only of small numbers' (p. 6; cf. pp. 33, 62). There is not a one-one correlation between German and English terms, however. Austin sometimes uses 'mean' for 'meinen' (e.g. pp. 3, 47), and there is one occurrence of 'means' (p. 33, fn. 2) and one of 'meaning' (p. 111) which have no direct German correlate. There are also occurrences of 'refer to' (e.g. pp. 33, 34, 60), translating expressions such as 'hindeuten' or 'sich beziehen auf'. In the first footnote to his translation, to the first occurrence of 'means' (p. I), Austin writes: "I have tried throughout to translate *Bedeutung* and its cognates by "meaning" and *Sinn* and its cognates by "sense", in view of the importance Frege later attached to the distinction. But it is quite evident that he attached no special significance to the words at this period."

<sup>25</sup> This is not the place to consider these problems. For my own account, see Beaney 1996, esp. ch. 5. For a more recent account, see Ebert 2016.



## 12 Geach and Black's *Translations* (1952, 1960 and 1980)

Let us return to Black's translation of 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung'. This was included in the first English collection of Frege's works: Geach and Black's *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, the first edition of which appeared in 1952. In including it, though, there was one small but significant change: 'Bedeutung' was no longer rendered, in the majority of cases, as 'referent' but as 'reference' throughout. Geach and Black provide a glossary listing how they translate Frege's key terms. In specifying that they translate 'bedeuten' as 'stand for' and 'Bedeutung' as 'reference [occasionally: what ... stands for]', there is the following footnote:

The natural rendering of these words would be 'mean' and 'meaning'; this rendering is actually required for their occurrence in German works quoted by Frege, and for his own use of the words when alluding to such quotations. But 'meaning' in ordinary English often answers to Frege's *Sinn* rather than *Bedeutung*. Russell's 'indicate' and 'indication' are barred because we need 'indicate' rather for *andeuten*. The renderings given here seem to be the simplest means of expressing Frege's thought faithfully. Philosophical technicalities, like 'referent' or 'denotation' or 'nominatum', would give a misleading impression of Frege's style. (1952, p. ix)

One might agree with what is said in the first three sentences here. But why is 'reference' now preferred to 'referent' as the translation? It is true that 'referent' is a technical term, introduced by Ogden and Richards, as we have seen. But why would adopting it mislead us as to Frege's style? Frege was not averse to introducing technical terms, as the examples of 'Wahrheitswerth' ('truth-value') and 'Werthverlauf' ('value-range') show. Yet nor was he averse to imbuing ordinary terms with a more precise meaning, as the examples of 'Begriff', 'Gedanke', and of course 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' show. The question, then, is whether we should attempt to express that more precise meaning by choosing the English term that best captures that meaning or whether we should choose the English term that corresponds most closely to the German term in all its ordinary uses (and allow the text itself, now in English translation, to imbue it with the more precise meaning Frege intended in writing the original German text). Should we

be faithful to Frege's intended meaning in a direct way, in other words, or to the term itself (as ordinarily used)?

Arguably, 'referent' is indeed the English term that best captures Frege's intended meaning (as the object referred to), while 'meaning' would be the English term that corresponds most closely to the German term in all its ordinary uses (making 'meaning' the best choice in translating 'Bedeutung' in Frege's work before 1891). 'Reference' might then be seen as the compromise candidate. On the one hand, it is not as technical as 'referent' yet can indeed be used with the meaning of 'referent'; on the other hand, while not corresponding as closely to 'Bedeutung' as 'meaning', it still has a broad range of everyday uses overlapping with those of 'Bedeutung'. Another advantage that 'reference' has, which Geach and Black do not mention here, is that it enables 'Bedeutung' to be translated in a uniform way throughout (bar obvious exceptions such as its use to mean 'significance'). As noted above, while in his 1948 translation Black generally rendered 'Bedeutung' as 'referent' (since in most cases it was clear that it was the object referred to that was intended), he also occasionally used 'reference' (for "the process", as he called it – or, as it might better be said, for the relation rather than for one of the relata). Using 'reference' throughout, given that one of its meanings is indeed 'referent', provides a greater degree of one-one correspondence with Frege's use of 'Bedeutung'.

A second edition of the *Translations* came out in 1960, with just minor corrections. In the third edition, published in 1980, however, there were several changes, the most significant – and controversial – of which was to the translation of 'Bedeutung' and 'bedeuten'. Instead of 'reference' and 'stand for', 'meaning' and 'mean' were now preferred. These changes were brought about by the need to standardize the renderings of Frege's terminology across all the translations published by Blackwell, as Geach and Black remark in their 'Note to Third Edition'. I will say more about this standardization in due course, but let us consider the particular change to the translation of 'Bedeutung' and 'bedeuten' here, while we are on the subject of Geach and Black's *Translations*.

The third edition retains the glossary but with the necessary changes made. In now specifying that 'bedeuten' is rendered as 'mean' and 'Bedeutung' as

'meaning [occasionally: what ... means]', the footnote quoted above is revised as follow, with the deletions highlighted by crossing out and the additions underlined:

The natural rendering of these words ~~would be~~ is 'mean' and 'meaning'; this rendering is ~~actually~~ required for their occurrence in German works quoted by Frege, and for his own use of the words when alluding to such quotations. (But 'meaning' in ordinary English often answers to Frege's *Sinn* rather than *Bedeutung*.) Moreover Russell's 'indicate' and 'indication' are barred because we need 'indicate' rather for *andeuten*. The renderings given here seem to be the simplest means of expressing Frege's thought faithfully. Philosophical technicalities, like 'referent' or 'denotation' or 'nominatum', would give a misleading impression of Frege's style; even 'reference' suggests thoughts alien to him. (Frege 1980, p. ix)

The revisions to this footnote suggest a rather quick fix. Just putting the second sentence in parentheses hardly addresses the issue of possible confusion with what Frege means by 'Sinn'. And what is meant by the claim that "even 'reference' suggests thoughts alien to him"? No further explanation is given.

The quick fix nature of the changes is also revealed in the text itself. Not only were some occurrences of 'reference' not changed (e.g. on p. 69) but only occurrences of 'stand for' were changed to 'mean', leaving other renderings of 'bedeuten' – for example, as 'designate' – unchanged (e.g. on p. 56). Furthermore, 'reference' was sometimes changed to 'meaning' and sometimes to 'thing meant', often appropriately enough, but the results were not always checked. For example, in the fourth paragraph of 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', Frege writes that the sense of a name "serves to illuminate only a single aspect of the reference [*Bedeutung*], supposing it to have one". Simply replacing 'reference' by 'thing meant', as is done in the third edition, suggests that the 'one' refers to the aspect and not the *Bedeutung*, which is not what is meant.<sup>26</sup> This error reveals very well the importance of what might be called the context principle in translation: only in the context of a sentence can a word be translated correctly.

In the first and second editions of the *Translations*, 'mean' and its cognates were used in translating terms other than 'bedeuten' and its cognates, such as 'meinen' and 'das heißt'. With the changes in the third edition, we now had many

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Beaney 1997, p. 46, fn. 106, where further details of the changes from the second to the third editions of the *Translations* are given.

more occurrences of 'mean' and its cognates. The result was thus highly unsatisfactory. One cannot tell from an occurrence of 'mean' or 'meaning' in the translated text whether 'bedeuten' or 'Bedeutung' was used in the original German text. As Russell might have put it, there is no backward route from 'mean' or 'meaning' to 'bedeuten' or 'Bedeutung'. Nor can one tell from the non-occurrence of 'mean' or 'meaning' that 'bedeuten' or 'Bedeutung' was not used. Since 'bedeuten' and 'Bedeutung' are used in a technical sense in Frege's writings from 1891, these are things that we do need to be able to tell. A golden rule of translation is always to render a technical term in the same way throughout, and to minimize the use of the term chosen to translate any other term. Frege would have strongly endorsed this golden rule; but it was egregiously flouted in the third edition of the *Translations*.

### 13 Furth's translation in 1964

After 1952, when the first edition of the *Translations* appeared, there were no further translations of Frege's writings published in book form until 1964, when Montgomery Furth's selections from the *Grundgesetze* appeared. 'Sinn' is here rendered as 'sense', 'Bedeutung' by 'denotation', and 'bedeuten' by 'denote'. Furth does not explain his choice of 'denotation' and 'denote'. In his introduction, however, he refers at several points to the work of Alonzo Church, whose paper 'A Formulation of the Logic of Sense and Denotation' had been published in 1951. So Church's terminology, in particular, may have influenced him. More importantly, it is clear from what he says in his introduction that he thinks of Frege's conception of *Bedeutung* as primarily an explication, in Carnap's sense, of the name-relation. Carnap and Furth were colleagues at UCLA at the time (Carnap had joined in 1954, Furth in 1959), and although Furth did not adopt Carnap's term 'nominatum', he seems to have been influenced by Carnap's account of Frege's conception of *Bedeutung*.

In initially explaining Frege's conception of names, Furth talks only of 'naming'. But in introducing Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, he writes: "Where we have used the words "is a name of" or "names" to describe a relation between a complete name and a certain object, Frege uses the term

"denotes" (*bedeutet*), and speaks of the object named by the name as the *denotation* (*Bedeutung*) of the name" (1964, p. xiv). He goes on to say that the same name-relation is seen by Frege as holding between incomplete expressions and functions: an incomplete expression may also have a 'denotation', in other words, in this case a function.

Why might 'denotation' be the best term to explicate the name-relation? Let us return to Ogden and Richards' triangle, where 'stands for' is used for what they call the 'imputed relation' between symbol and referent at the base of the triangle (with 'symbolises' and 'refers to' used for the other two relations). From what they say in chapter 9 of *The Meaning of Meaning*, it is clear that 'denotes' is seen as an alternative term for 'stands for', in other words, that it, too, is used for the imputed relation. On the Russellian view (which Ogden and Richards criticize), of course, this is taken not as an imputed or indirect relation (mediated through thought) but as a direct relation. The key point here, however, is that whether or not one agrees with Russell or Ogden and Richards about this, it does seem that 'denotes' is *taken* (rightly or wrongly) as a direct relation.

This lends support to the suggestion that I made in *The Frege Reader* (1997, p. 41) that it was perhaps no accident that Furth chose 'denotation' rather than 'reference' to translate 'Bedeutung' in the *Grundgesetze*, since in mathematics it is more natural to think of the 'names' used there as somehow directly 'denoting' or 'standing for' things. If there are any reasonably robust 'linguistic intuitions' in this area, then 'denotes' might seem the more appropriate term to use than 'refers to' in saying, for example, that simple numerals such as '1', '2' and '3' denote numbers.

Of course, Frege himself insists that we only 'bedeutet' something (object, function, or truth-value) *through* a sense: he would have agreed with Ogden and Richards that there is no direct relation here. But it is noteworthy that in the *Grundgesetze* Frege does not talk much about sense. In what Furth translates, we are twice referred to Frege's famous essay on the topic, but the only conception of sense that is articulated is the one that concerns the sense of names of truth-values (sentences): the sense that such a name expresses is given by stating the

conditions under which it names (*bedeutet*) the True.<sup>27</sup> So to the extent that sense is downplayed in the *Grundgesetze*, it might seem more natural to translate 'Bedeutung' as 'denotation'. Moreover, the fact that sentences in Frege's logical system (Begriffsschrift) are construed as names of truth-values might seem to reinforce the view that what Frege has in mind in talking of 'Bedeutung' and 'bedeuten' is essentially a name-relation, which might make 'denotation' seem the most appropriate term to translate 'Bedeutung'.

In *The Frege Reader* I speculated that 'denotation' has been preferred by people discussing Frege's philosophy of mathematics, especially in the States, and 'reference' has been preferred by people discussing Frege's philosophy of language, particularly in Britain. I now think that it is much more complex than this suggests. But Furth's choice of 'denotation' to translate 'Bedeutung' is certainly consistent with this speculation.

#### 14 Donnellan's distinction between denoting and referring

The subtleties involved in our (changing) use of 'denotation' and 'reference' and their respective cognates is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the famous dispute between Russell and Strawson over the theory of descriptions. The two classic papers are, of course, Russell's 'On Denoting', published in 1905, and Strawson's 'On Referring', published in 1950. The titles are significant, but what is most worth noting here is that in 'On Denoting' Russell never uses the term

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<sup>27</sup> For the record, in the material that Furth translated, there are just 13 passages in which there is talk of 'sense'. 5 occur in the 'Vorwort': pp. IX fn., X, XVI, XVIII, XXI–XXII, of which only the first two relate to the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction itself, though without explaining it. 8 occur in Part I: pp. 7, 16 fn., 20, 25 fn., 45, 50–51, 59, 71, of which the third, fourth and the last two are not really relevant ('Sinn' is not really being used in its technical sense, although consistently with that sense). The first (p. 7) introduces the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction, but refers us in a footnote to his essay on the distinction. The second is just a brief remark in a footnote (p. 16 fn.), and the fifth concerns Frege's view of definitions, that they must encapsulate sameness of both *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (pp. 44–45). It is only in the sixth (in §32) that we have an explanation of sense, in the case of names of truth-values. Every such name, Frege writes, "*expresses* a sense, a *thought*. For owing to our stipulations, it is determined under which conditions it refers to [*bedeute*] the True. The sense of this name, the *thought*, is: that these conditions are fulfilled". He goes on to say: "Now, the simple or complex names of which the name of a truth-value consists contribute to expressing the thought, and this contribution of the individual name is its *sense*. If a name is part of the name of a truth-value, then the sense of the former name is part of the thought expressed by the latter." (pp. 50–51, as translated by Ebert and Rossberg) On the relative lack of talk of 'sense' in the *Grundgesetze*, cf. Simons 1992.

'reference' or any of its cognates and (even more noteworthy) in 'On Referring' Strawson never uses the term 'denotation' or any of its cognates.

For Russell, in the case of what he calls a 'denoting phrase' (which includes what we now call definite descriptions), 'denoting' is the relation between the phrase and what (if anything) it denotes.<sup>28</sup> In 'On Denoting' he is concerned with the problems that arise when we try to understand how denoting phrases work, one such problem (but not the only one) being the problem of phrases that lack a denotation. For Strawson, on the other hand, 'referring' is something that *we do* in using an expression, not something that the expression by itself does. He never explains why he does not use the term 'denotation' or any of its cognates, nor does he comment on why Russell does, but it is clear from his account that he is distancing himself from Russell's views and that a different term was therefore appropriate. Strawson would presumably have agreed with Ogden and Richards that 'denoting' is only an 'imputed' relation, which is unpacked by recognizing that a symbol is always "used by someone to stand for a referent", as Ogden and Richard put it (quoted in §7 above).

This is not the place to enter into the details of the dispute between Russell and Strawson. I mention it here as it is what Keith Donnellan attempts to adjudicate in 'Reference and Definite Descriptions', which appeared in 1966. This paper is perhaps most famous for the distinction it draws between 'referential' and 'attributive' uses of definite descriptions. For present purposes, however, what is most relevant is the distinction he also draws between referring and denoting. Explicating Russell, Donnellan writes that "a definite description denotes an entity if that entity fits the description uniquely" (1966, p. 293). Referring, on the other hand, is what a speaker does in using a definite description "to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about" (1966, p. 285). The two come apart in certain kinds of cases. To take one of Donnellan's examples, I may succeed in referring to someone in using the definite description

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<sup>28</sup> Proper names also denote the objects (if any) they name, according to Russell. This is maintained throughout Russell's work, though he came to restrict the claim to 'logically proper names'. But this is not discussed in 'On Denoting'.

'the man drinking martini over there' even if the phrase does not, in fact, denote – because the man is actually drinking water, say.

Again, this not the place to discuss Donnellan's arguments. What is worth noting here is the way the distinction between denoting and referring is characterized. 'Denoting' has Russellian connotations and 'referring' Strawsonian connotations, reflecting, we might suggest, deeper commitments to 'ideal language philosophy' and 'ordinary language philosophy', respectively. 'Denotation', it seems to me, fits more comfortably into talk of logical and mathematical languages, while 'reference' may be the more appropriate term to use in discussing our use of natural languages.

### 15 Dummett's first translation of 'Bedeutung' as 'meaning'

In 1967 Dummett published an article on 'Frege's Philosophy' in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. With the exception of Wittgenstein's use of 'meaning' to translate 'Bedeutung' (in both his own and Frege's work) and uses of 'meaning' (such as in Austin's translation of the *Grundlagen*) to translate 'Bedeutung' before 1891, this marks the first use of 'meaning' to translate 'Bedeutung' as used by Frege once the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction had been drawn. Here is what Dummett says about this:

The standard translation of the German word *Bedeutung* is 'meaning', but Frege's use of it is conventionally rendered as 'reference' (with 'stand for' as the cognate verb). The rendering has this much justification, that it is certainly incorrect to say (as is occasionally said) that Frege's distinction is between two ingredients in the meaning of an expression (as his distinction between sense and colouring is). Rather, if 'meaning' is taken as the mechanism or rule determining the use of an expression, then Frege's 'sense' is (the main) part of an expression's meaning, whereas his *Bedeutung* is not part of it at all but is what is meant by the expression in an altogether different use of the word 'mean'. From here on 'meaning' will be used only as the translation of Frege's *Bedeutung* and 'mean' as that of *bedeuten*; any awkwardness in this use of the English words is matched by Frege's use of the German ones. In place of 'meaning' in the sense of what is known when an expression is understood (Frege himself had no word for this) 'significance' will be used; significance thus includes, but is not exhausted by, sense. The 'meaning' of a name, in Frege's use, is its bearer, that which we use the name to talk *about*. (1978 [1967], p. 103)



There are clear allusions here to Geach and Black's *Translations*, to Strawson's conception of the meaning of an expression as the general directions for its use, and to Wittgenstein's discussion in the *Philosophical Investigations* of the idea of the meaning of a proper name as its bearer. Perhaps it was this latter idea that made the translation of 'Bedeutung' in Frege's writings by 'meaning' seem appropriate. We will return to this shortly, but let us also note here Dummett's use of 'significance' – not least because this is also a term that has been offered as the translation of 'Bedeutung', as we will now see.

### 16 Tugendhat's suggested translation of 'Bedeutung' as 'significance'

In 1970 Ernst Tugendhat, who was influential in the development of German analytic philosophy in the 1970s, published a paper entitled 'The Meaning of 'Bedeutung' in Frege', in which he argued that the best translation is 'significance'. Terms such as 'reference', 'denotation' and 'nominatum', he writes, are misleading because they "suggest that what Frege meant by the *Bedeutung* of an expression is the object which the expression names" (1970, p. 177). Taken literally, this is false, since Frege held that predicates (concept-words) can also have a *Bedeutung*: the *Bedeutung* (if it has one) of a concept-word is the relevant concept itself, and Frege stressed that concepts (as 'unsaturated') are fundamentally distinct from objects (as 'saturated'). There had earlier been some debate about whether Frege held that concept-words also had *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*,<sup>29</sup> an issue that was resolved in the affirmative when Frege's *Nachgelassene Schriften* was published in 1969. In 'Ausführungen über Sinn und Bedeutung', written shortly after 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung', Frege makes his position very clear.

What is needed, then, is an account of Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' that does justice to all three of its applications – to proper names, concept-words and sentences. Instead of starting with the *Bedeutung* of names and seeing how to extend the conception of *Bedeutung* here to sentences and concept-words, Tugendhat proposes starting instead with the *Bedeutung* of sentences and using

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the papers by Marshall ('Frege's Theory of Functions and Objects' and 'Sense and Reference: A Reply'), Dummett ('Frege on Functions: A Reply'), Grossmann ('Frege's Ontology') and Jackson ('Frege on Sense-Functions'), all reprinted in Klemke 1968.

Frege's key idea of the functional connection between sentences and their parts to understand the *Bedeutung* of names and concept-words. The *Bedeutung* of a sentence, according to Frege, is its truth-value (if it has one), and the *Bedeutung* of its parts, Tugendhat argues, should therefore be seen as their 'truth-value potential': their contribution to the truth-value of the sentences in which they occur. The best English term (of the genuine contenders for translating 'Bedeutung') to capture this idea, he suggests, is 'significance': "sentences are significant ('*bedeutungsvoll*') insofar as they are true or false; predicates are significant insofar as they are true of some objects and false of others; and names are significant insofar as they refer to something of which predicates can be true or false" (1970, pp. 185–6).

Tugendhat's proposal has three main merits. First, in giving primacy to sentences rather than names (or concept-words), it does justice to Frege's context principle. Although the context principle was formulated only in the *Grundlagen* of 1884, it arguably continued to influence Frege's later philosophy.<sup>30</sup> Second, it takes seriously the functional connection between sentences and their parts, which is central to Frege's thinking from the *Begriffsschrift* onwards. Third, it gives greater plausibility to Frege's view that the *Bedeutung* of a sentence is its truth-value. Saying that the 'significance' of a sentence (as used on a given occasion) lies in its truth-value is less strange than saying that sentences 'refer to' or 'denote' truth-values.

In criticism of Tugendhat's proposal, however, three points can be made. First, whatever one's view of the role of the context principle after the *Grundlagen*, it remains the case that Frege motivates his *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction in the first place by considering proper names – not just in 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' but wherever he explains it, such as in his correspondence. Second, his argument that the *Bedeutung* of a sentence is its truth-value proceeds *from* the claim that the *Bedeutung* of a name is the object it *bedeutet*. Third, and underlying these first two points, the name-object relation does seem to be the dominant model in Frege's thinking about *Bedeutung*. In coming to the conclusion that the *Bedeutung* of a sentence is its truth-value, he immediately goes on to characterize truth-values as

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<sup>30</sup> For discussion of this, see the papers by Linnebo and Weiner in the present volume.

objects (see e.g. 1892a, p. 34/1997, p. 158). Of course, Tugendhat is right the *Bedeutung* of a concept-word is not an object, on Frege's view, but Frege recognizes that his position on concepts needs special explanation, and his view of the 'unsaturated' nature of concepts is notoriously problematic anyway.<sup>31</sup>

Few have followed Tugendhat in seriously advocating the use of 'significance' in translating 'Bedeutung'. One supporter, however, is another German analytic philosopher and leading Frege scholar, Gottfried Gabriel. In a discussion published in a special issue of the *Philosophical Quarterly* on Frege in 1984, he argued that Frege's conception of the *Bedeutung* of a sentence as its truth-value could be made even more plausible by locating it in the context of neo-Kantianism, and in particular, the work of Wilhelm Windelband, of the 'value-theoretical' Southwest School. It is controversial just how influential neo-Kantianism was on Frege,<sup>32</sup> but the important point here is the further support it offers to the proposal to translate 'Bedeutung' as 'significance' to reflect the idea of the 'truth-valuability' of sentences. Whether or not we regard this as convincing, it does at least provide another excellent illustration of how interpretations of Frege's philosophy motivate choices of how to translate key terms.

## 17 Reverting to 'reference'

In 1971 Eike-Henner Kluge published a volume of translations of Frege's writings on the foundations of geometry and formal theories of arithmetic together with related material by Hilbert, Korselt and Thomae, whose work Frege was criticizing. In his preface there is just one term on the translation of which Kluge feels the need to comment:

A word about the translation of *Bedeutung* by 'reference'. *Bedeutung* in German may mean either meaning, reference, or significance, depending on the context. It is systematically ambiguous. The present translation has the advantage of stressing quite clearly that for Frege, *Bedeutung* is a technical term whose core-meaning is that of 'reference'. However, that it is a technical term should not blind the reader

<sup>31</sup> For further criticism of Tugendhat's proposal, see Dummett 1981 [1973], pp. 199–203. Dummett's central objection is that "Tugendhat has stripped the notion of reference of the character of being a *relation* to something extra-linguistic: it has become, in his hands, essentially an equivalence relation between expressions" (p. 200).

<sup>32</sup> For more on the German influences on Frege, see Gabriel 2013.

to the fact that even in Frege's usage it retains certain associations. It is because of these that some of the peculiar difficulties raised by Thomae in his first paper arise. Any consistent rendition of *Bedeutung* by 'reference' would yield patent nonsense: one simply does not speak of the reference of a chess piece. Here 'significance' is the correct translation; and since part of its meaning is the same as that of 'reference', a consistent rendering by 'significance' initially seemed possible. Aside from consistency, it would also have had the advantage of permitting us to render into English, puns that hinge on the systematic ambiguity of *Bedeutung*, since 'significance' shares this ambiguity to a large degree. There are, then, substantive reasons for preferring 'significance' to 'reference'. However, there are two considerations that argued against such a translation. First, it would have been unfamiliar and thus might have caused confusion. Second, the plural of 'significance' is somewhat unusual and would have lent a peculiar ring to some passages. I have therefore used the more traditional 'reference' except in the article by Thomae. (1971, p. ix)

The first point to make here is that Kluge does not consider other possible translations of 'Bedeutung', most notably, 'denotation', especially since this – even more than 'reference' – makes clear that Frege uses 'Bedeutung' as a technical term. Leaving this aside, however, Kluge is quite right that Frege's critique of formalism raises particular difficulties for translating 'Bedeutung'. Thomae claims that "Chess pieces are signs that have no content in the game other than the one assigned to them by the rules of the game" (as translated by Kluge in Frege 1971, p. 115). He wants to express this by saying that the chess pieces have no 'Bedeutung', and yet, he writes, "it would be surely be absurd to claim that the knight in chess has no *Bedeutung*, or that a number has no *Bedeutung* in formal arithmetic" (ibid., pp. 115–16; leaving 'Bedeutung' untranslated here). I agree with Kluge that translating 'Bedeutung' here by 'reference' is inappropriate: it does not capture the nuance of the contrast being made. It is not absurd to say that chess pieces have no 'reference' (though it might be a rather odd way to say what is presumably intended), but it would certainly be absurd to claim that they have no 'meaning' at all. Kluge translates 'Bedeutung' here by 'significance', which works, though I think that 'meaning' is actually the best term to use in this particular case. Thomae's view is that chess pieces have no 'meaning' in the sense of 'content' but do have 'meaning' in the sense of playing a role in a game (so don't have no 'meaning' at all).

This brings out a further important point to make about translation, especially in philosophy. We often have to consider not just the writer's own use

of a certain term but the use of that same term by others whose work that writer is citing, criticizing or discussing. It will always be a question to ask whether the writer uses the term in the same way as those others. Translating the term uniformly may obscure the differences, and in particular, if a rendering is chosen to make best sense of the writer, it may, by the same token, make the views of others more implausible than they actually are. Frege offers a powerful critique of Thomae's formalism, but he makes little attempt to be charitable, and characterizing Thomae's views in his own terms is one reflection of this. A translator needs to be aware of this kind of danger.

With the exception of this use of 'significance' in translating Thomae's work, Kluge uses 'reference' throughout his translations,<sup>33</sup> and this use of 'reference' to translate 'Bedeutung' was strongly reinforced when Dummett finally published his first book on Frege, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, in 1973. Ignoring his earlier use of 'meaning', he now reverted to 'reference', accepting that this was the term that had become conventionally established. He writes:

Frege's actual word is, of course, 'Bedeutung', which is simply the German word for 'meaning': but one cannot render 'Bedeutung', as it occurs in Frege, by 'meaning', without a very special warning. The word 'reference' does not, I think, belie Frege's intention, though it gives it much more explicit expression: its principal disadvantage is that it has also become customary to translate the cognate verb 'bedeuten' by the non-cognate verbal phrase 'stand for'. The tradition is unfortunate, but it is established, and I shall therefore for the most part follow it, giving notice when I use some other expression for the noun 'Bedeutung' or the verb 'bedeuten'. (1981 [1973], p. 84)

Dummett presumably had Geach and Black's *Translations* in mind in criticizing the use of 'stand for' for 'bedeuten', and I agree with Dummett that in an ideal translation, or wherever possible, cognate terms should be rendered by correspondingly cognate terms.

Switching from 'meaning' to 'reference' also allowed Dummett to use 'meaning' for what he had earlier, in 'Frege's Philosophy' (1967), called

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<sup>33</sup> When Kluge's translations were reprinted in Frege's *Collected Papers* (1984), 'reference' was replaced by 'meaning', in accord with the standardization agreed for the various Blackwell volumes (see §18 below).

'significance' (see §15 above). 'Meaning' becomes the broadest category, comprising 'sense', 'tone' and 'force', but not 'reference', which Dummett explicitly states is not an ingredient of meaning (1981 [1973], pp. 84, 91).<sup>34</sup> He also goes on to note, quite rightly, that "Frege almost always uses the noun 'Bedeutung' to apply to the actual thing for which a word stands, though the verb 'bedeuten' signifies the relation between them" (ibid., pp. 93–4). Since we want to distinguish between the relation and the thing to which the word is so related, he suggests using 'referent' for the latter – the term, as we have seen (in §7 above), that Ogden and Richards introduced for just this purpose. Dummett continues:

We shall therefore henceforth use the abstract noun 'reference' only as applying to the relation between the word and the thing, or to the property of standing for something, or, again, to the property of standing for some particular given thing—context should resolve ambiguities between these three uses; but we shall use the word 'referent' as applying to the thing for which the word stands. (1981 [1973], p. 94)

As we saw in discussing Black's first translation of 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' in 1948 (see §9 above), 'Bedeutung' was sometimes rendered by 'reference' but mostly by 'referent', for precisely the reason Dummett mentions: that this is what Frege means on the vast majority of occasions. However, as we also saw (in §12 above), when Black's translation was reprinted in Geach and Black's *Translations* of 1952, 'Bedeutung' was rendered throughout by 'reference'. This preserved uniformity, at the cost of increasing ambiguity – but then this ambiguity is precisely what is there in the original German.

Geach and Black's *Translations* and Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language* did most to consolidate the use of 'reference' to translate 'Bedeutung', and of both 'reference' and 'referent' in discussing Frege's ideas. But if one thought that by the mid-1970s, agreement had finally been reached on the translation of 'Bedeutung', then one was soon in for a rude shock. A semantic earthquake was about to erupt.

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<sup>34</sup> For criticism of this, see Potts 1982, §2, on "The Translation of 'Bedeutung'".

## 18 The decision to translate 'Bedeutung' by 'meaning'

As described in 'A Brief History', Frege's *Kleine Schriften* was published in 1967, followed by *Nachgelassene Schriften* in 1969 and *Wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel* in 1976. The appearance of the *Nachgelassene Schriften*, in particular, of which nothing had previously been published, raised the question of its translation into English. Blackwell, the publisher of both Geach and Black's *Translations* and Austin's translation of the *Grundlagen*, was keen to publish this, too, and a meeting took place soon after its appearance to discuss standardizing the translation of key terms. Dummett, Geach, William Kneale, Roger White, who was to translate the *Nachgelassene Schriften* together with Peter Long, and a representative from Blackwell attended the meeting, and it was agreed to translate 'Bedeutung' and its cognates by 'meaning' and its respective cognates.<sup>35</sup> Dummett had recently published his article on 'Frege's Philosophy' (1967), and this seemed to carry the day. (This was before the publication of *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, in which, as we have just seen, Dummett reverted to 'reference'.<sup>36</sup>)

*Posthumous Writings* was finally published in 1979, and a third edition of *Translations* appeared in 1980. The changes that were made in this third edition concerning the translation of 'Bedeutung' have already been discussed (see §12 above). Here is what the translators say in their preface to *Posthumous Writings* in explaining their renderings of key terms:

First and foremost we have parted company with all previous English translators of Frege by rendering 'bedeuten' and 'Bedeutung' as 'mean' and 'meaning'. We have done this throughout, both before and after he formulated his celebrated distinction between *Sinn* (sense) and *Bedeutung* (except of course where the obvious translation of 'Bedeutung' is 'importance' or 'significance'). And cognate terms such as 'bedeutungsvoll' and 'gleichbedeutend' we have accordingly rendered by 'meaningful' and 'having the same meaning'. 'Meaning' is, after all, the natural English equivalent for 'Bedeutung', and renderings such as 'reference' and 'denotation' are strictly incorrect and have only been adopted by other translators for exegetical reasons. We have thought it better not to beg questions of exegesis by suggesting through translation a certain view of what Frege meant in his later writings by 'Bedeutung', leaving it rather to the reader to form his own judgement of the contrast Frege intended by his *Sinn-Bedeutung* distinction. If his later use of

<sup>35</sup> See Potts 1982, pp. 139–40, where the date of the meeting is given as 1970.

<sup>36</sup> I have it on good authority that the translators of *Posthumous Writings* were intensely irritated by this, but they nevertheless stuck with the decision, as did Geach in making the changes to the third edition of the *Translations*.

'bedeuten' and 'Bedeutung' reads oddly in German, this oddness should be reflected in translation and not ironed out by mistranslation. (1979, pp. VI–VII)<sup>37</sup>

In talking of 'meaning' as the natural English equivalent of 'Bedeutung' and of terms such as 'reference' and 'denotation' being "strictly incorrect", this echoes what is said in the glossary to the third edition of the *Translations* (see §12 above). In talking of reflecting the oddness of Frege's own talk of 'Bedeutung', we find an echo of what Dummett said in 'Frege's Philosophy' (see §15 above). What Long and White add here is a claim about not begging questions of exegesis in translation. This would certainly seem a virtue in translating, at least in principle. The problem lies in realizing it in practice. If anything has been demonstrated in our exploration of translating 'Bedeutung' up to this point, it is surely that translation is no less a creature of its time and context than any other intellectual endeavour. Long and White's choice of 'meaning' to translate 'Bedeutung' is no exception and it very quickly generated further controversy.

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<sup>37</sup> For the record, what the editor, Brian McGuinness, says in his preface to *Collected Papers* is simply this: "As in most previous publications from this house 'Bedeutung' has throughout been rendered by 'meaning'" (1984, p. viii). In his preface to *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, however, he writes: "we, too, render *Bedeutung* by 'meaning'", but goes on to suggest that this rendering was "accepted by Frege in his correspondence with Jourdain" (1980, p. xviii). I am puzzled as to what McGuinness had in mind here. As we saw in §4 above, Jourdain translates 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' by 'meaning' and 'denotation', respectively. He does *not* use 'meaning' for 'Bedeutung'. However, in a letter to Jourdain dated 28 January 1914, in reporting how difficult he found it to read Russell's *Principia* ("I stumble over almost every sentence"), he comments on Russell's discussion of meaning. He writes (in German): "Also ein Symbol hat nach Russell eine Bedeutung (meaning)". (Frege 1976, p. 129/tr. in Frege 1980, p. 81) But what Frege is doing here is rendering Russell's use of 'meaning' in English as 'Bedeutung' in German. This is surely the best way to translate Russell (though having said that, it makes it easier for Frege to criticize Russell, as something of his own conception of *Bedeutung* then creeps in). But that is not the same thing as translating Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' in German as 'meaning' in English. Interestingly, at another point in Frege's correspondence with Jourdain, in commenting on Jourdain's account of his work, he writes (in German): "Hier sind die Wörter "signify" and "express" zu beachten. Jenes scheint dem "bezeichnen", dieses dem "ausdrücken" zu entsprechen. Nach der nun von mir angenommenen Redeweise sage ich: "ein Satz drückt einen Gedanken aus und bezeichnet dessen Wahrheitswerth.["]" (1976, p. 119. This is not translated as such in the *Correspondence*, but see p. 184, n. 16 for the corresponding note.) Frege uses 'bezeichnen', not 'bedeuten' here, and implicitly endorses the use of 'signify' in English to capture this. Perhaps he recognized that there were problems in talking of 'bedeuten' – and 'mean' – here, and chose alternative terms accordingly. In this regard, it is also worth noting that Frege, in a letter to Peano, suggested that the Italian word that came closest to 'Bedeutung' was 'significazione' (1976, p. 196/1980, p. 128). So perhaps the English terms that he would have been most happy to see used in translating 'bedeuten' and 'Bedeutung' are 'signify' and 'signification'. (Cf. Künne 2010, p. 204, where 'signification' is also suggested as the best translation of 'Bedeutung'.) At any rate, I can find no evidence for McGuinness' claim that Frege himself accepted the translation of 'Bedeutung' by 'meaning'.



## 19 The dispute between Bell and the translators of *Posthumous Writings*

Shortly after *Posthumous Writings* appeared, David Bell published a short article in *Analysis* called 'On the Translation of Frege's *Bedeutung*' in which he argued that the choice of 'meaning' was "unacceptable" (1980, p. 191). He first explains what he takes Frege to mean by the 'Bedeutung' of proper names, predicate expressions and sentences, which he sums up as their property of being 'truth-valuable' (1980, pp. 191–3). 'Reference', he says, captures this much better than 'meaning': "Indeed Frege's use of the term has very little to do with meaning" (1980, p. 193). In answer to the question as to why Frege did not coin a technical term to express exactly what he meant, he suggests that Frege did not want to repel his readers and chose an ordinary German word just as he did in talking of 'thought', 'object', 'concept' and 'function', to which he also gave new senses (*ibid.*).

'Reference', Bell goes on to argue, has several advantages: (i) it is an acceptable translation; (ii) it prevents confusion between what Frege meant by 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung'; (iii) it preserves the informality of Frege's style; (iv) it respects the peculiarity of his usage of 'Bedeutung'; (v) it conforms to (what by then was) established practice; and (vi) it captures what Frege meant better than any other English word (*cf.* 1980, pp. 194–5). Bell concludes:

what could be more unattractive or confusing to the newcomer than to discover that a philosopher revered for his incisive clarity of style and for his profound insight into how language works, seems to believe that the sentence 'no men are mortal' has the same meaning as the sentence ' $2 + 2 = 5$ '; or that every sentence of fiction is quite without meaning; or that the predicate 'is a round square' is perfectly meaningful, while the predicate 'is a christian' is in fact meaningless? It was presumably to avoid just such consequences as these that every translator, up to the present time, has avoided rendering '*Bedeutung*' as 'meaning'. They were, I think, not wrong to do so. (1980, p. 195)

Bell is not entirely correct in his penultimate sentence: as we have seen, 'meaning' had been used to translate 'Bedeutung' by Wittgenstein in both his own and Frege's writings, by translators (such as Austin in his translation of the *Grundlagen*) of Frege's pre-1891 writings (*i.e.*, before the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction was drawn), and by Dummett in 1967. But Bell is right that there was

no published translation, up to that point, of any of Frege's writings after 1891 that had used 'meaning'.

Peter Long and Roger White replied to Bell in the very same issue of *Analysis*. They made explicit the 'principle of exegetical neutrality' that they had followed:

if at any point in a text there is a passage that raises for the native speaker legitimate questions of exegesis, then, if at all possible, a translator should strive to confront the reader of his version with the same questions of exegesis and not produce a version which in his mind resolves those questions. (1980, p. 196)

Since 'meaning' and its cognates, they write, "correspond almost exactly" to 'Bedeutung' and its cognates, any departure from the natural translation would beg questions of exegesis (*ibid.*).

Long and White make a number of points in defending their translation. But there are four main arguments that emerge from their reply.<sup>38</sup> The first concerns the continuity of Frege's philosophy and the terms that he himself employed. Since 'Bedeutung' is, in general, naturally and unproblematically translated as 'meaning' in his writings before 1891, to suddenly change to some other term such as 'reference' or 'denotation' in translating his later writings, they argue, is to make an exegetical decision. Of course, Frege does indeed use 'Bedeutung' in a more technical sense from 1891, but if he had wanted to make clearer that this is what he was doing, then he could have chosen a different term himself. He did not, so we should respect this and use the same term ourselves in translating 'Bedeutung' throughout his writings.

The second argument concerns Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' in his later writings when it is unclear that his technical sense is intended. Here again exegetical decisions would have to be made if 'Bedeutung' is translated differently. We have already noted one kind of example of this: when Frege is discussing the work of others, such as Thomae (see §17 above). Using 'meaning' when Frege is

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<sup>38</sup> In *The Frege Reader*, I identified the first three of these arguments, though I have come at them afresh in the present essay. The fourth I also considered but later on in my discussion. As we will see, it raises a rather different issue.

reporting someone else's views but 'reference', say, when he is counterposing his own views would fail to capture the dialectic between them. Another example which raised particular problems for the translators of the *Nachgelassene Schriften* was the dating of certain pieces, when it was unclear whether they were written before or after 1891. Using 'meaning' throughout avoided having to decide on this.

The third argument concerns the translation of 'Bedeutung' in writings by others, and in particular, by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's use of 'Bedeutung' has generally been translated as 'meaning', including by Wittgenstein himself. If Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' is translated any differently, Long and White write, "there is a real danger that the reader without German will fail to see the connections between Frege and his greatest disciple and will lack any sense of how Wittgenstein's thought developed in part through a dialogue with Frege" (1980, p. 201). When Wittgenstein attacks the idea that 'the meaning of a word is an object', for example, we must recognize that Frege is one of the targets here.

The fourth argument concerns the confusion that translating 'Bedeutung' by 'meaning' generates in an English reader. For Bell, this was a strong reason against the translation. Long and White point out, however, that the confusion is just as likely to be generated in a German reader, and that it is not therefore the job of a translator to remove such potential confusion.

In response to the first argument, it might be suggested that we consider translating at least some of the occurrences of 'Bedeutung' and its cognates in Frege's pre-1891 writings by our preferred choice of English terms for Frege's post-1891 writings. 'Refer to' or 'denote', for example, certainly work for some of these earlier uses. Maybe more 'exegesis' is needed here, but that cannot, in fact, be avoided by the good translator. I shall come back to this shortly.

The second argument also cuts both ways. We could use other terms than 'meaning' and its cognates when Frege is discussing the work of others, for example. And as far as the dating of certain pieces is concerned, surely this is where we do want to draw on exegetical expertise to offer the best possible dating and therefore translation.

As far as the third argument is concerned, why is Wittgenstein singled out here? Dummett was also heavily influenced by Frege, and since he talks a lot (at least from 1973 onwards) of 'reference', why should this not be just as good an argument for translating 'Bedeutung' by this term – to help us see how Dummett's thought "developed in part through a dialogue with Frege"? At this point in Long and White's reply, any pretence of 'exegetical neutrality' has surely been abandoned. They are allowing their own interpretation not only of Frege but also of Wittgenstein to influence their choice of translation. In fact, they fail to do justice even to the story of translations of Wittgenstein's work. They write: "Except in special contexts, no translator has entertained the idea of rendering '*Bedeutung*' as used by Wittgenstein in any other way than by 'meaning'" (1980, p. 201). In a footnote they recognize that Anscombe used 'reference' in her translation of the *Notebooks*, but only at "one or two places". As we saw in §6 above, however, this is incorrect. Although she was inconsistent in her translation, she specifically states that she renders 'Bedeutung' by 'reference', and one of her reasons for doing so was to make clear that Wittgenstein was under the influence of Frege. Ironically, then, Anscombe uses 'reference' to translate Wittgenstein precisely because it had been used (by Geach and Black) to translate Frege!

As to Geach and Black's earlier translation of Frege, Long and White make this comment in another footnote:

It is, of course, understandable that Geach and Black should have chosen 'reference' as their translation for '*Bedeutung*'. In 1952, when their translation first appeared, Frege was a relatively unknown thinker and such a rendering provided readers with a way of orienting themselves to what Frege was saying. The term had not then acquired the philosophical currency it now enjoys. (1980, p. 210, fn. 1)

This really gives the game away (as often happens in footnotes!). Translations are not at all exegetically neutral. In being creatures of their time and context, they have their own rationale and assumptions, and draw on the philosophical currency then in vogue. It is clear that Long and White saw themselves as providing readers, among other things, with a way of orienting themselves to how Frege influenced Wittgenstein. This is not illegitimate in itself, but it cannot be defended by wielding the sword of 'exegetical neutrality'.

The fourth argument raises a different kind of issue, since it concerns not the use of 'Bedeutung' in relevant texts but the understanding of the reader. Should we seek to translate so as to preserve the confusion that a native speaker would have encountered – or might still encounter – on first reading a text? This would seem to put a translator on treacherous ground. What kind of reader should we take into account? Other experts? The general reader? What texts should we suppose they will have read before coming to the text being translated? Should we not translate so as to maximize understanding in our target readership, without taking actual liberties with the text? Is that not the purpose of translation?<sup>39</sup>

We might recast this question in terms of the distinction introduced at the beginning of this essay. Should we produce 'foreignizing' or 'domesticating' translations? Using 'meaning' to render 'Bedeutung' might seem an obvious example of a foreignizing translation: it makes Frege's views, initially at least, sound alien and forces us to think carefully about what is going on. On the other hand, using 'reference', say, seems to result in a more domesticating translation: assuming understanding of the idea of 'reference', it brings the author to the reader, rather than the other way round, in Schleiermacher's terms. Frege is presented as addressing just those questions that are familiar to us today, even if his answers then strike us as downright wrong.

Once again, however, the issues are more complex than this simple opposition suggests. For 'meaning' itself might be seen as a more 'domesticated' term than 'reference', while 'denotation' and especially 'nominatum' would seem more 'foreignized'. What causes the problem for translators in Frege's writings after 1891 is that he uses a very ordinary German word, 'Bedeutung', in a much more technical way. So we either preserve the ordinariness, as far as possible, which makes 'meaning' the obvious translation, or capture the technical use, which makes 'reference', 'denotation' or 'nominatum', in increasing order of

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Simons 1992, p. 758, fn. 15: "The one translation into English that every native speaker of German I have asked agrees to be unfortunate is the "obvious" translation as "meaning". Why throw away (say my informants) that lucky advantage we English speakers have of *not* being misled by the standard meaning (!) of "Bedeutung" when in German a long explanation has to be given that Frege clearly *was* deviating from standard German usage, as Husserl and others acknowledged by *not* following Frege. German discussions now often *follow* English terminology by using words like *Referenzgegenstand* or *Bezug(sgegenstand)* for Frege's *Bedeutung*."

technicality, a more appropriate term. Alerting the reader, by suitable choice of term, to Frege's technical use would count as 'foreignizing'. Certainly, using a term such as 'nominatum' enriches our own language in just the way Schleiermacher favoured in advocating foreignizing translation.

Long and White make many pertinent points in defence of their choice of 'meaning' to translate 'Bedeutung', and some important issues are raised in the process. Unlike any previous translator of Frege's writings, with the exception of Geach, they had to translate texts from right across Frege's career, which presents particular difficulties. (Geach translated a lot of material from 1891 onwards, but also the first part of the *Begriffsschrift*.) And their strongest argument, in my opinion, concerns the need to respect the fact that Frege chose 'Bedeutung', a word he had used before in a more everyday sense, for his technical term from 1891. Despite its technical use, it still retained associations with its earlier and normal uses, and Frege indeed trades on these in some of his arguments (such as in motivating the idea of the 'significance' of a sentence lying in its truth-value), and this is what is so hard to capture.<sup>40</sup> What is most striking about Long and White's defence, however, is their frequent appeal to exegetical points. They begin by formulating a principle of exegetical neutrality, but by the time they argue for the importance of understanding how Frege influenced Wittgenstein, the principle has flown out of the window. As we have seen throughout this essay, no translation is exegetically neutral, and Long and White's translation is no exception.

## 20 The Frege Reader

*The Frege Reader* was published in 1997. I explained its rationale and the selection of texts in §7 of 'A Brief History' (see above, in this volume). Here I shall comment

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<sup>40</sup> For further arguments against 'reference' as the translation of 'Bedeutung', see Potts 1982. Potts was one of Long's and White's colleagues at Leeds. He writes: "the ambiguities of 'reference' have given birth to an industry, and it bids fair to rival 'idea' in seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy as the most over-worked term in the philosophy of the age. The protests at the reversion to 'meaning' in recent translations of Frege already bear witness to the extent of intellectual investment since 1948 in the notion of reference. Yet it is usually possible to avoid the term in discussions of meaning, and to do so with an increase, rather than sacrifice of clarity." Potts argues in his paper that "the notion which needs to be pursued in assessing Frege's arguments in this area is that of *value*, together with *evaluation*". (1982, p. 158)

on the policy that I adopted concerning the translation of 'Bedeutung', as discussed in the final section of my introduction. Like Long and White, I also faced the problem of including texts from right across Frege's career, which entailed deciding on the key issue of how to handle the change in Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' from 1891.

Criticizing Long and White's arguments for translating 'Bedeutung' as 'meaning', I stressed the value of drawing on exegetical knowledge in translation. While a principle of exegetical neutrality, suitably formulated, is a good guide to follow, it is not the only principle. No less important is what I formulated as the principle of interpretive integrity:

if at any point in a text there is a term or passage that raises legitimate questions of exegesis, then, whilst using their interpretive skills to offer the best translation they can, a translator should, if at all possible, note the original word(s) used and justify the translation offered, to enable the reader to make up their own mind about the issues involved. (1997, p. 39)

Long and White had talked of using footnotes as a 'wretched expedient' (1980, p. 199), but where problematic terms are used at key points in the texts, it seems to me essential to signal them, and footnotes are an obvious device to do so. Further explanations can be offered in an introduction, glossary or appendix, which are all part of the editorial apparatus that should accompany scholarly translations.

As far as the translation of 'Bedeutung' is concerned, having reviewed all the options, I decided in the end that the best way to respect the principle of interpretive integrity was to simply leave 'Bedeutung' untranslated at all points in Frege's writings after 1891, except where it was clearly intended in a different sense (such as 'significance'). Frege's use of cognate terms, especially the verb 'bedeuten', was more problematic, since its inflections would have produced inelegant sentences if left untranslated. Here I used (or retained, in the case of translations I took over) the most appropriate term, but always with the German placed in square brackets immediately after. In the pre-1891 writings I also used whatever term was most appropriate in the context for each occurrence of

'Bedeutung' and its cognates, but again signalling each use in square brackets or footnotes.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, leaving a key term untranslated is only to be recommended in exceptional circumstances or as a last resort. In scholarly discussions, I noted, 'Bedeutung' is indeed often used untranslated, precisely so as not to beg questions of exegesis or interpretation, just as 'eudaimonia' is often left untranslated in discussions of Aristotelian ethics or 'Geist' in discussions of German idealism. If forced to choose, however, I acknowledged that 'reference' and its cognates would be my preference, at any rate for Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' and its cognates from 1891. (I use 'reference' and its cognates in teaching Frege's philosophy and in writing for student and more general readers.) 'Meaning', I think, exacerbates the eccentricity of Frege's use of 'Bedeutung', while 'nominatum' and even 'denotation' are too technical. 'Significance' does not capture the fact that Frege does regard the *Bedeutung* of a name as an object, but 'referent', while therefore most accurate in this case, could not be used for all occurrences of 'Bedeutung', since sometimes the relation is intended, and a uniform rendering is to be preferred. 'Reference' may be something of a compromise, but I genuinely think 'refer to' works as well as one could wish for 'bedeuten'. Revisiting it all today, some 20 years after working on *The Frege Reader*, and if – *per impossibile* – we could begin again from scratch, I would be tempted to use 'signification' and 'signify';<sup>42</sup> but as I said in my introduction, 'On Sense and Signification' might sound like a hybrid work by Austen and Austin. Despite the use of 'meaning' and 'mean' in the trilogy published by Blackwell between 1979 and 1984, as well as in the third edition of the *Translations*, the terms have never really caught on, while 'reference' and 'refer to' seem to have settled into established usage.

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<sup>41</sup> For the record, I used 'meaning', 'significance', 'denotation' or their cognates, depending on context. (I omitted to mention the use of 'denotation' and 'denote' in the Glossary; 1997, p. xiii.) For a comparison, in his translation of the *Begriffsschrift*, Bynum uses 'meaning' or 'importance' for 'Bedeutung', and 'mean', 'refer to', 'signify' or 'stand for' for 'bedeuten'. Bynum writes: "Frege does not yet have a carefully developed semantical theory. Thus, the present terms ['Bedeutung' and 'bedeuten'] are very loosely used and are not contrasted with the later technical terms *Sinn* (sense) and *ausdrücken* [sic; it should be *ausdrücken*] (express), respectively" (1972, p. 79).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Simons 1992, p. 758, fn. 15: "'Reference' and its cognates are now so well established it would be asking for trouble to suggest *yet* another translation, but I cannot help thinking that in an ideal world English speakers could avail themselves of "signification" and its cognates." Cf. fn. 37 above.



## 21 The complete translation of the *Grundgesetze*

A complete English translation of Frege's *Grundgesetze* was only finally published in 2013.<sup>43</sup> Translated by Philip Ebert and Marcus Rossberg, under the direction of Crispin Wright, it also involved the advice of a panel of experts and several workshops took place to discuss the translation. At the first of these workshops (in 2006) there was a long and heated debate about how to translate 'Bedeutung' and its cognates (and various other key terms), and in the end the decision was reached to use 'reference' and its cognates. Here is how the decision is reported in the translators' introduction:

Given that after 1892 Frege takes the *Bedeutung* of a term to be the object referred to/denoted by that term, we decided to make this aspect clear and use 'reference' instead of Geach and Black's 'meaning'. The reason we decided to adopt 'reference' and not to follow Furth in using 'denotation' is three-fold: firstly, 'reference' as a translation of '*Bedeutung*' in Frege's writings after 1892 is better entrenched in the literature than 'denotation' (it is Frege's famous "sense/reference distinction"); secondly, 'denotation' has the ring of an artificial technical term that both 'reference' and '*Bedeutung*' lack; thirdly, some of the cognates of '*Bedeutung*' are more easily translated using cognates of 'reference'. '*Gleichbedeutend*', for example, can easily be translated as 'co-referential', while 'co-denotational' seems somewhat unnatural; the same holds of the triple '*bedeutungsvoll*', 'referential', 'denotational'. (2013, pp. xvii–xviii)

Of course, as Ebert and Rossberg also point out, they did not have to face the problem of translating works across the whole of Frege's career; and indeed, the vast majority of Frege's uses of 'Bedeutung' and its cognates in the *Grundgesetze* are in his technical sense. But there are exceptions, most notably, when Frege is citing or discussing the work of others, such as Thomae. Here, unlike Kluge (see §17 above), they use 'reference' (as opposed to 'significance') and its cognates as well. Doing otherwise, they write, "would obscure the fact that Frege takes the quoted author's use of '*Bedeutung*' to be in line with his specific use of '*Bedeutung*'" (2013, p. xviii). As noted earlier, though, the danger here is giving Frege an easier run for his money. Frege was rarely charitable to those whose

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<sup>43</sup> For an account of the major project that was needed to undertake the translation, see Wright's foreword and the translators' introduction to the translation.

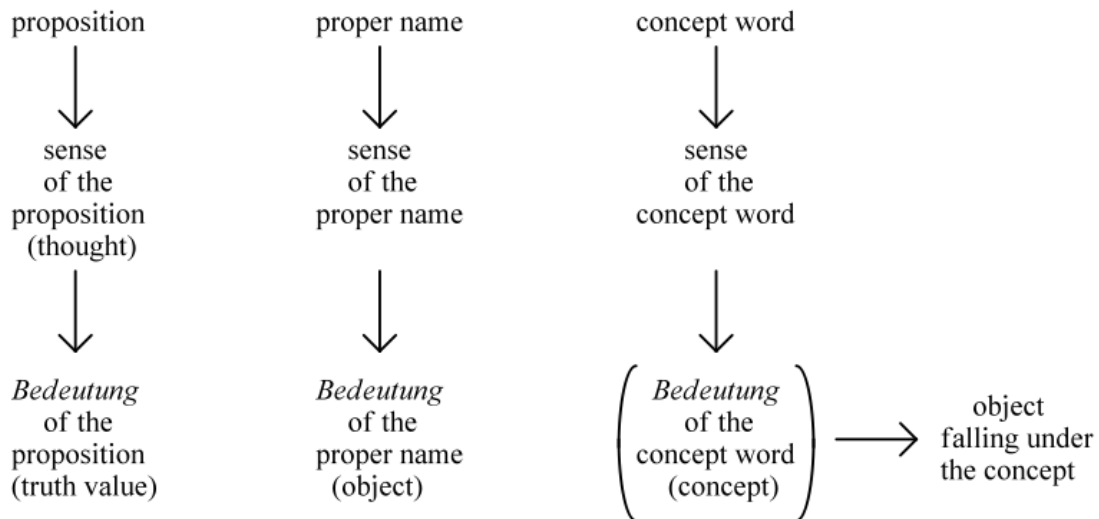
views he criticized, and we have to be careful not to allow translation to accentuate the uncharitability. Again, a footnote or explanation such as Ebert and Rossberg provide may be all that is needed to alert the reader to this danger.

In Ebert and Rossberg's translation, as they remark (*ibid.*), their translation of 'Bedeutung' is single-valued in both directions: 'Bedeutung' is only translated by 'reference' and every occurrence of 'reference' in the translation corresponds to 'Bedeutung' in the original German text. This is certainly ideal in a translation, but can only be achieved in special cases, such as when we have a single text in which a term is only used in a technical sense.

## **22 *Bedeutung*: One relation or three relations?**

With the story of translations of 'Bedeutung' now brought up to date, let us take stock and consider what diagnoses might be offered of the variation in translations, before returning to the questions raised at the beginning of this essay and drawing some conclusions. We can come at what I want to suggest is the main underlying philosophical issue by taking the relational sense of 'Bedeutung' and asking whether the relation here should be understood as one relation or three relations.

In a letter to Husserl dated 24 May 1891, Frege sets out his position on the *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* of the three categories of expressions as follows (1997, p. 149; translating 'Satz' here by 'proposition'):



In each of the three cases, the *Bedeutung* is what is *bedeutet* by the relevant expression via its sense. Frege himself, however, sometimes uses 'Bedeutung' in the relational sense and he certainly uses the verb 'bedeuten' in talking of the relation between the expression and what is *bedeutet* in all three cases. So he clearly thinks that there is just one relation here. But what if there were three different relations? Imagine a language in which we did indeed have three different verbs for the respective cases, so that we spoke, say, of sentences 'signifying', proper names 'denoting', and concept-words 'ascribing'.<sup>44</sup> Treating Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' as systematically ambiguous, it would then be open to us to translate Frege as maintaining that sentences signify truth-values, proper names denote objects, and concept-words ascribe concepts. Perhaps this would help reduce the confusion generated in the minds of some readers when first confronted with Frege's views, especially in the case of sentences and concept-words. Of course, what would nevertheless prevent us from translating Frege in this way is the functional connection that he took to hold between sentences, proper names and concept-words, as expressed in the claim that the *Bedeutung* of a sentence is determined by the *Bedeutungen* of its parts. So it clearly made sense

<sup>44</sup> For the suggestion that 'ascribing' is the appropriate term to use for the relation between concept-words and concepts, precisely intended to help resolve Frege's notorious paradox of the concept 'horse', see Wright 1998.

for Frege to use just one term in all three cases, and any translation must respect this.

Of course, we could take signifying, denoting and ascribing – in our imagined language – to be species of one generic relation, which is called 'referring', say. The species are distinguished according to the category of relata (sentences/truth-values, names/objects, concept-words/concepts). But now let us assume that there is something in this imagined language that is reflected in our actual English language. Perhaps speakers do use certain 'referring' terms with the category of relata in mind (however unconsciously). 'Denoting', in particular, seems to me to be used primarily in cases where the name/bearer relation is at issue. If this is right, then it is not surprising that people are reluctant to think of sentences as 'denoting' truth-values: such talk would involve some kind of category mistake. On the other hand, we may well regard the 'significance' of something as lying in its value, so that we may be less disturbed if someone were to talk of sentences as 'signifying' their truth-value. As we have seen, those who have preferred 'denotation' as the translation of 'Bedeutung', from Russell onwards, have indeed had the name/bearer relation primarily in mind, while those who have suggested 'significance', such as Tugendhat and Gabriel, have emphasized the role played by truth-value and 'truth-value potential'.

Another way to come at some of the differences in our uses of 'referring' verbs is to consider what might be said about their own *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. This is not something that Frege considered, but he would presumably have thought that all such verbs have the relation of *Bedeutung* as their *Bedeutung* – in other words, that 'x signifies y', 'x denotes y', 'x ascribes y', 'x refers to y', etc., all *bedeutet* this relation. So should we see the differences between these terms as differences in *Sinn*? There would certainly be differences in our imagined language. Using 'denotes', for example, would indicate that we are talking about a relation between proper names and objects. To say that 'The Morning Star' denotes Phosphorus would be to say that the relation of *Bedeutung* holds between the proper name 'The Morning Star' and Phosphorus: this relation is being determined (or presented) as a relation between a proper name and an object. In our actual languages – both English and German – the situation is less clear-cut; but we might

be inclined to regard some of the differences in the category of *relata* as pertaining to the sense of the relevant referring verbs.

If any of this is right, then we have one possible diagnosis of some of the variation in translations of 'Bedeutung': the different interpretations that are offered of Frege's conception of *Bedeutung* draw on and reflect implicit appeal to 'intuitions' about our use of (or the sense of) 'referring' verbs. However, it cannot be said that these 'intuitions' are at all robust here, so this can only be a small part of the story. More significant is the very fact that these intuitions are not robust: this grants interpreters the license to choose their own terms. Not only have a wide range of different terms been used and suggested, but interpreters have changed their mind on how to translate 'Bedeutung'. Russell switched from 'indication' to 'denotation', and Dummett from 'meaning' to 'reference', for example, and there was a wholesale change from 'reference' to 'meaning' in the Blackwell trilogy. All this shows that there has been no settled vocabulary in our talk of the various phenomena of 'meaning' (in the broadest sense of that term), so that the translation of Frege's use of 'Bedeutung' has been just one element in a very complex and contested debate over just how to describe and explain these phenomena.

### **23 Bending terms in translation**

At the time that Frege was writing, there was certainly no settled vocabulary for use in thinking about and understanding the various phenomena of meaning. With a limited number of terms available, Frege took two of the most common – 'Sinn' and 'Bedeutung' – to express his distinction. He used them in new senses, which nevertheless had connections to the existing senses. This gives a translator two options: to use the English terms that correspond most closely – in their everyday use – to the German terms, which in this case would be 'sense' and 'meaning'; or to find or introduce new terms to express the new senses. In the first case, the translator will have to allow the translated text(s) themselves to show how the old terms are being used in new senses; in the second case, the translator can help the reader immediately to the extent that the new terms reflect more accurately the new senses.

To return to the distinction introduced at the beginning of this essay, and as suggested above (§19), the first option would seem to represent a 'foreignizing' approach to translation, the second a more 'domesticating' approach. Both Herder and Schleiermacher favoured the foreignizing approach and recognized what was required for this to work. In taking over an existing word from our own language to translate a foreign term with a rather different sense, the usage of that existing word will need to be 'bent' to reflect that different sense.<sup>45</sup> In the case of translating 'Bedeutung' by 'meaning', for example, the usage of 'meaning' does indeed need to be bent in saying such things as that sentences 'mean' truth-values and that 'no men are mortal' and ' $2 + 2 = 5$ ' have the same 'meaning'.

Given that no existing English term exactly captures the technical sense that Frege gave 'Bedeutung' from 1891 onwards, however, some bending will be required whatever term we use. The only alternative would be to introduce an entirely new term, such as 'nominatum', as Carnap did. But even here, it is hard to avoid accompanying philosophical baggage. Carnap introduced 'nominatum' in explicating what he took to be Frege's conception of *Bedeutung*, based on the name/bearer relation. So some bending is required here, too, to cover its application in the case of sentences and concept-words. As already argued at several points above, 'reference' seems to come somewhere between 'meaning' and 'nominatum', and might therefore be suggested as the best compromise. But here, too, bending is required, especially – once again – to cover the cases of sentences and concept-words; and in many ways, we can see what has happened since the term was first used by Black in translating 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' in 1948 as a process of bending its usage to accommodate Frege's conception of *Bedeutung*. Indeed, as we saw in §7 above, 'reference' and certainly 'referent' were only introduced as technical terms in capturing semantic relations by Ogden and Richards in 1923, so that Black's translation relies on an earlier history of bending, in which the terms were shaped for philosophical purposes, to make his translation possible.

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<sup>45</sup> For discussion of this 'bending' strategy, see Forster 2010, ch. 12 (cited in fn. 1 above). The German verb is 'biegen', from which 'Biegsamkeit' ('flexibility') derives.

Looking at the situation today, we can see that 'reference' has indeed been bent into shape to capture Frege's use of 'Bedeutung', at least in the case of names. (This is even true in the German-speaking world, in which 'Referenz' and 'Referenzgegenstand' have been coined for 'reference' and 'referent', translating back from the English and in effect thereby providing a modern German translation of Frege's use of 'Bedeutung'.) We still have to allow Frege's texts themselves to bend the term further to enable its application to sentences and concept-words. But the bending that has occurred supports its current use in translating 'Bedeutung'. 'Meaning', on the other hand, has such a variety of uses that it is hard to envisage its ever being sufficiently bent to represent Frege's use of 'Bedeutung'. So, in my view, this provides a decisive reason for preferring 'reference' to 'meaning'. As to 'nominatum', this has never caught on, and 'significance' or 'signification', although they have their merits, have only been suggested by interpreters and not actually used in existing translations. This leaves 'denotation' as the only serious rival. For me, what is decisive about the choice between 'reference' and 'denotation' is the Russellian connotations of the latter. It seems (to me) more appropriate to talk of 'referring' rather than 'denoting' *through* a sense (which was Frege's conception). 'Denoting' conjures up more of an idea of a (supposed) direct relation between linguistic expression and object – as Ogden and Richards captured in their triangle, in representing it as an 'imputed' relation. 'Reference' may now have certain Strawsonian connotations, but since Strawson is closer to Frege than to Russell, these are not as distorting as the Russellian connotations of 'denotation'. Over the years, 'reference' has been bent into more of a Fregean shape, while 'denotation' has been bent into more of a Russellian shape.

## 24 Towards a linguistic phenomenology of 'referring' verbs

In a revealing passage in his 1918 lectures on the philosophy of logical atomism, Russell wrote the following:

Perhaps I ought to say a word or two about what I am understanding by symbolism, because I think some people think you only mean mathematical symbols when you talk about symbolism. I am using it in a sense to include all

language of every sort and kind, so that every word is a symbol, and every sentence, and so forth. When I speak of a symbol I simply mean something that 'means' something else, and as to what I mean by 'meaning' I am not prepared to tell you. I will in the course of time enumerate a strictly infinite number of different things that 'meaning' may mean but I shall not consider that I have exhausted the discussion by doing that. I think that the notion of meaning is always more or less psychological, and that it is not possible to get a pure logical theory of meaning, nor therefore of symbolism. ...

As to what one means by 'meaning', I will give a few illustrations. For instance, the word 'Socrates', you will say, means a certain man; the word 'mortal' means a certain quality; and the sentence 'Socrates is mortal' means a certain fact. But these three sorts of meaning are entirely distinct, and you will get into the most hopeless contradictions if you think the word 'meaning' has the same meaning in each of these three cases. It is very important not to suppose that there is just one thing which is meant by 'meaning', and that therefore there is just one sort of relation of the symbol to what is symbolized. A name would be a proper symbol to use for a person; a sentence (or a proposition) is the proper symbol for a fact. (1956 [1918], pp. 186–7)

One can take issue with several things that Russell says here, but what is most striking is the 'three sorts of meaning' Russell distinguishes. Whether we talk of 'meaning' or 'reference' or use some other term, Russell clearly thinks that names, concept-words and sentences all 'mean' in different ways: there are three different relations here. Indeed, he suggests that there are indefinitely many things that 'meaning' may mean. If we take note of the different 'meaning' verbs that are actually in use in the English language, then Russell's point can be dramatically reinforced. Here is a list of such 'meaning' verbs, grouped in order to bring out some of their similarities and differences:

- (1) mean; signify; symbolize; represent;
- (2) name; denote; designate; refer to; stand for; denominate; be a sign of; point to;
- (3) indicate; correspond to; picture; express; connote; ascribe; epitomize; mark; demarcate; reflect;
- (4) clarify; elucidate; analyse; explicate; explain; interpret; translate; render; paraphrase; rephrase; reword; summarize; encapsulate; encode;
- (5) suggest; imply; implicate; convey; transmit; invoke; allude to; gesture towards.



This list is not intended to be exhaustive, nor the grouping anything other than suggestive. But it should suffice to indicate the wide range of such verbs. In the present essay we have explored some of the uses of the terms in the first and second groups. Not only are there intricate relations of similarity and difference between the uses of these terms, but each term itself is also used in a variety of ways. The phenomena of 'meaning' are indisputably complex.

In 'A Plea for Excuses', his Presidential Address to the Aristotelian Society in 1956, J. L. Austin – the first translator of Frege's *Grundlagen* – characterized his way of doing philosophy as 'linguistic phenomenology' (1956, p. 182). This term is very apt for what is needed in understanding the complex phenomena of meaning. We need to pay close attention to the uses of meaning verbs, in all their nuances and subtle distinctions. As Austin stressed, this is not simply a linguistic exercise:

When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situations, we are looking again not *merely* at words (or 'meanings', whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena. (1956, p. 182)

We should pay heed, for example, to the fact that 'denoting' is generally used only in the case of names, and ask ourselves whether there is a difference in our use of 'denoting' and 'referring': perhaps this may indeed lead to a sharpened awareness of some of the phenomena of meaning.

Anyone who does serious translation engages in a form of linguistic phenomenology: they have to be acutely sensitive to the uses of words and the distinctions that are drawn in both the language they are translating and the language into which they are translating. They must indeed acquire as sharpened a perception as they can of the phenomena being described in order to translate as well as they can. Conversely, a good way to engage in linguistic phenomenology is to translate. (It is no coincidence that Austin undertook the translation of the *Grundlagen*.) More specifically, a good way to engage in the linguistic phenomenology of meaning itself is to translate texts that offer accounts of the phenomena of meaning. As we have seen, philosophical understanding of Frege's

conception of *Bedeutung* has gone hand-in-hand with considerations of how to translate 'Bedeutung' and related terms.

## 25 Conclusion

The story of the translation of 'Bedeutung' in Frege's writings not only sheds light on our understanding of Frege's philosophy and the historical development of that understanding, but also serves as an instructive case study – and indeed, cautionary tale – for all those undertaking philosophical translation. A remark by Herder was quoted at the beginning of this essay: a translator, he suggested, should be philosopher, poet, and philologist. In the case of philosophical literature, we can agree about the first. Being something of a poet is a useful quality to have as a translator. In the specific case of philosophy, the ability to pick up on and express linguistic nuances and inter-textual allusions is a valuable skill. But in the light of what has just been said, I would replace 'poet' by 'linguistic phenomenologist' to capture this best. As to being a 'philologist' (a slightly antiquated term in the English-speaking world), I would replace this by 'historian of philosophy': we need to recognize the roots of key terms and the relevant debates in earlier works of philosophy and related texts. In the case of philosophy, then, I would suggest domesticating Herder's remark as follows:

The best translator must be the best exegete ... Where is a translator who is simultaneously philosopher, linguistic phenomenologist, and historian of philosophy? They should be the morning star of a new epoch in our philosophical literature!<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Talks based on drafts of this paper have been given at seminars and workshops at the University of York and New York University in May 2014, the University of Stirling in May 2014 and June 2015, the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in June 2014, Beijing Normal University in November 2014 and October 2015, and the University of Hull in May 2015. I am grateful to the participants for helpful questions and discussion, and especially Thomas Baldwin, Philip Ebert, Jiang Yi, Geert Keil, Robert May, Olaf Müller, Walter Pedriali, Marcus Rossberg, Kai Wehmeier and Crispin Wright. I would also like to thank Philip Ebert and Roger White for written comments on the penultimate draft of this paper.

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